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STORIES



CALL HIM SAVAGE!

By John Pollard

NEW
SCIENCE
FICTION!

Ross Rocklynne • Robert Arthur
Walter Miller • Dan T. Moore • others

RALPH CASTENIR

a portfolio



The life of Leonardo Da Vinci has fascinated both the scientist and the artist alike. The stature and versatility of this genius is without parallel in either ancient or modern times. Castenir feels justified in dividing Leonardo's career—for better visualization—into two sections. Thus, he achieves a novel perspective on a monumental figure. The portfolio is continued on page 70.

THE TWO LIVES OF LEONARDO DA VINCI

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●

OR SO YOU SAY . . .

WITH the change from large-to digest-size in the format of Amazing Stories some months ago, the editors decided to drop the "Letters to the Editor" column. In the past a large percentage of readers had registered strong disapproval of our "wasting" space in that fashion — space that could be put to better use by filling it with story material.

Well, like the man said, you just can't please everybody. From the first issue, almost every letter we've received screamed bloody murder at us for omitting the letters column. The protests weren't only from the same readers each month; they came from people who, they said, had never written to a magazine before and would probably never write again. They claimed that many of the letters in the old days were as entertaining as *any* fiction, that the writers' reactions to the stories we ran were interesting, amusing and often almost too revealing.

When the file of such requests got too thick to ignore, your editors held a conference about the matter. Somebody sent out for coffee, the office door was locked,

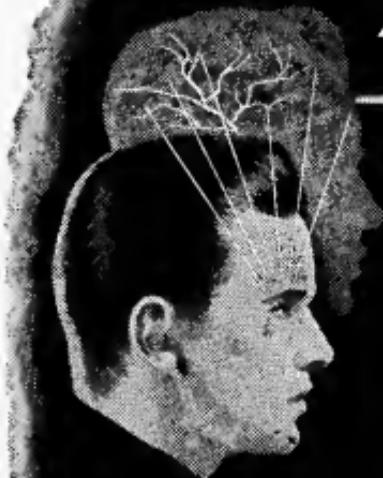
we leaned back and rested our shoe-counters on desk tops, and the conference was under way.

One of the editors had a good deal to say on the subject — all of it negative. He pointed out that using such a department would get as many complaints as not using it. The reason why the anti's weren't being heard, he pointed out, was that there was no reason to protest over something that wasn't being done anyway. It made a lot of sense and he almost had the other editors sold, until it suddenly occurred to us that the boy who was doing all the opposing was the same one who would have to do all the work on the letter column!

So, we took his coffee away from him and sent him out to have lunch with an author, then made our decision. Beginning in the near future, the "Letters to the Editor" column would be restored to Amazing Stories. If enough interesting letters came in as a result, the department would be a fixture; if not, it would be dropped again.

Which puts it squarely up to you. — HB

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DEATH OF A SPACEMAN

BY WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

The manner in which a man has lived is often the key to the way he will die. Take old man Donegal, for example. Most of his adult life was spent in digging a hole through space to learn what was on the other side. Would he go out the same way?

OLD DONEGAL was dying. They had all known it was coming, and they watched it come — his haggard wife, his daughter, and now his grandson, home on emergency leave from the pre-astronautics academy. Old Donegal knew it too, and had known it from the beginning, when he had begun to lose control of his legs and was forced to walk with a cane. But most of the time, he pretended to let them keep the secret they shared with the doctors — that the operations had all been failures, and that the cancer that fed at his spine would gnaw its way brainward until the paralysis engulfed vital organs, and then Old Donegal would cease to be. It would be cruel to let them know that he knew. Once, weeks ago, he had joked about the approaching shadows.

"Buy the plot back where people won't walk over it, Martha," he said. "Get it way back under the cedars — next to the fence. There aren't many graves back there yet. I want to be alone."

"Don't *talk* that way, Donny!" his wife had choked. "You're not dying."

His eyes twinkled maliciously. "Listen, Martha, I want to be buried face-down. I want to be buried with my back to space, understand? Don't let them lay me out like a lily."

"Donny, *please!*"

"They oughta face a man the way he's headed," Donegal grunted. "I been up — *way* up. Now I'm going straight down."

Martha had fled from the room in tears. He had never done it again, except to the interns and nurses, who, while they insisted

that he was going to get well, didn't mind joking with him about it.

Martha can bear my death, he thought, can bear pre-knowledge of it. But she couldn't bear thinking that he might take it calmly. If he accepted death gracefully, it would be like deliberately leaving her, and Old Donegal had decided to help her believe whatever would be comforting to her in such a troublesome moment.

"When'll they let me out of this bed again?" he complained.

"Be patient, Donny," she sighed. "It won't be long. You'll be up and around before you know it."

"Back on the moon-run, maybe?" he offered. "Listen, Martha, I been planet-bound too long. I'm not too old for the moon-run, am I? Sixty-three's not so old."

That had been carrying things too far. She knew he was hoaxing, and dabbed at her eyes again. The dead must humor the mourners, he thought, and the sick must comfort the visitors. It was always so.

But it was harder, now that the end was near. His eyes were hazy, and his thoughts unclear. He could move his arms a little, clumsily, but feeling was gone from them. The rest of his body was lost to him. Sometimes he seemed to feel his stomach and his hips, but the sensation was

mostly an illusion offered by higher nervous centers, like the "ghost-arm" that an amputee continues to feel. The wires were down, and he was cut off from himself.

He lay wheezing on the hospital bed, in his own room, in his own rented flat. Gaunt and unshaven, gray as winter twilight, he lay staring at the white net curtains that billowed gently in the breeze from the open window. There was no sound in the room but the sound of breathing and the loud ticking of an alarm clock. Occasionally he heard a chair scraping on the stone terrace next door, and the low mutter of voices, sometimes laughter, as the servants of the Keith mansion arranged the terrace for late afternoon guests.

With considerable effort, he rolled his head toward Martha who sat beside the bed, pinch-faced and weary.

"You ought to get some sleep," he said.

"I slept yesterday. Don't talk, Donny. It tires you."

"You ought to get more sleep. You never sleep enough. Are you afraid I'll get up and run away if you go to sleep for awhile?"

She managed a brittle smile. "There'll be plenty of time for sleep when . . . when you're well again." The brittle smile fled and she swallowed hard, like swallow-

ing a fish-bone. He glanced down, and noticed that she was squeezing his hand spasmodically.

There wasn't much left of the hand, he thought. Bones and ugly tight-stretched hide spotted with brown. Bulging knuckles with yellow cigaret stains. My hand. He tried to tighten it, tried to squeeze Martha's thin one in return. He watched it open and contract a little, but it was like operating a remote-control mechanism. Goodbye, hand, you're leaving me the way my legs did, he told it. I'll see you again in hell. How hammy can you get, Old Donegal? You maudlin ass.

"Requiescat," he muttered over the hand, and let it lie in peace.

Perhaps she heard him. "Donny," she whispered, leaning closer, "won't you let me call the priest now? Please."

He rattled a sigh and rolled his head toward the window again. "Are the Keiths having a party today?" he asked. "Sounds like they're moving chairs out on the terrace."

"Please, Donny, the priest?"

He let his head roll aside and closed his eyes, as if asleep. The bed shook slightly as she quickly caught at his wrist to feel for a pulse.

"If I'm not dying, I don't need a priest," he said sleepily.

"That's not right," she scolded softly. "You know that's not

right, Donny. You know better."

Maybe I'm being too rough on her? he wondered. He hadn't minded getting baptized her way, and married her way, and occasionally priest-handled the way she wanted him to when he was home from a space-run, but when it came to dying, Old Donegal wanted to do it his own way.

He opened his eyes at the sound of a bench being dragged across the stone terrace. "Martha, what kind of a party are the Keith's having today?"

"I wouldn't know," she said stiffly. "You'd think they'd have a little more respect. You'd think they'd put it off a few days."

"Until—?"

"Until you feel better."

"I feel fine, Martha. I like parties. I'm glad they're having one. Pour me a drink, will you? I can't reach the bottle anymore."

"It's empty."

"No it isn't, Martha, it's still a quarter full. I know. I've been watching it."

"You shouldn't have it, Donny. Please don't."

"But this is a party, Martha. Besides, the doctor says I can have whatever I want. Whatever I want, you hear? That means I'm getting well, doesn't it?"

"Sure, Donny, sure. Getting well."

"The whiskey, Martha. Just a finger in a tumbler, no more. I

want to feel like it's a party."

Her throat was rigid as she poured it. She helped him get the tumbler to his mouth. The liquor scared his throat, and he gagged a little as the fumes clogged his nose. Good whiskey, the best—but he couldn't take it any more. He eyed the green stamp on the neck of the bottle on the bed-table and grinned. He hadn't had whiskey like that since his space-days. Couldn't afford it now, not on a blastman's pension.

He remembered how he and Caid used to smuggle a couple of fifth saboard for the moon-run. If they caught you, it meant suspension, but there was no harm in it, not for the blastroom men who had nothing much to do from the time the ship acquired enough velocity for the long, long coaster ride until they started the rockets again for Lunar landing. You could drink a fifth, jettison the bottle through the trash lock, and sober up before you were needed again. It was the only way to pass the time in the cramped cubicle, unless you ruined your eyes trying to read by the glow-lamps. Old Donegal chuckled. If he and Caid had stayed on the run, Earth would have a ring by now, like Saturn—a ring of Old Granddad bottles.

"You said it, Donny-boy," said the misty man by the billowing curtains. "Who else knows the

Gegenschein is broken glass?"

Donegal laughed. Then he wondered what the man was doing there. The man was lounging against the window, and his unzipped space rig draped about him in an old familiar way. Loose plug-in connections and hose-ends dangled about his lean body. He was freckled and grinning.

"Caid," Old Donegal breathed softly.

"What did you say, Donny?" Martha answered.

Old Donegal blinked hard and shook his head. Something let go with a soggy snap, and the misty man was gone. I'd better take it easy on the whiskey, he thought. You got to wait, Donegal, old lush, until Nora and Ken get here. You can't get drunk until they're gone, or you might get them mixed up with memories like Caid's.

Car doors slammed in the street below. Martha glanced toward the window.

"Think it's them? I wish they'd get here. I wish they'd hurry."

Martha arose and tiptoed to the window. She peered down toward the sidewalk, put on a sharp frown. He heard a distant mutter of voices and occasional laughter, with group-footsteps milling about on the sidewalk. Martha murmured her disapproval and closed the window.

"Leave it open," he said.

"But the Keith's guests are

starting to come. There'll be such a racket." She looked at him hopefully, the way she did when she prompted his manners before company came.

Maybe it wasn't decent to listen in on a party when you were dying, he thought. But that wasn't the reason. Donegal, your chamber-pressure's dropping off. Your brains are in your butt-end, where a spacers brains belong, but your butt-end died last month. She wants the window closed for her own sake, not yours.

"Leave it closed," he grunted. "But open it again before the moon-run blasts off. I want to listen."

She smiled and nodded, glancing at the clock. "It'll be an hour and a half yet. I'll watch the time."

"I hate that clock. I wish you'd throw it out. It's loud."

"It's your medicine-clock, Donny." She came back to sit down at his bedside again. She sat in silence. The clock filled the room with its clicking pulse.

"What time are they coming?" he asked.

"Nora and Ken? They'll be here soon. Don't fret."

"Why should I fret?" He chuckled. "That boy — he'll be a good spacer, won't he, Martha?"

Martha said nothing, fanned at a fly that crawled across his pillow. The fly buzzed up in an angry spiral and alighted on the

ceiling. Donegal watched it for a time. The fly had natural-born space-legs. I know your tricks, he told it with a smile, and I learned to walk on the bottomside of things before you were a maggot. You stand there with your magnasoles hanging to the hull, and the rest of you's in free fall. You jerk a sole loose, and your knee flies up to your belly, and reaction spins you half-around and near throws your other hip out of joint if you don't jam the foot down fast and jerk up the other. It's worse'n trying to run through knee-deep mud with snow-shoes, and a man'll go nuts trying to keep his arms and legs from taking off in odd directions. I know your tricks, fly. But the fly was born with his magnasoles, and he trotted across the ceiling like Donegal never could.

"That boy Ken — he ought to make a damn good space-engineer," wheezed the old man.

Her silence was long, and he rolled his head toward her again. Her lips tight, she stared down at the palm of his hand, unfolded his bony fingers, felt the cracked calluses that still welted the shrunken skin, calluses worn there by the linings of space gauntlets and the handles of fuel valves, and the rungs of get-about ladders during free fall.

"I don't know if I should tell you," she said.

"Tell me what, Martha?"

She looked up slowly, scrutinizing his face. "Ken's changed his mind, Nora says. Ken doesn't like the academy. She says he wants to go to medical school."

Old Donegal thought it over, nodded absently. "That's fine. Space medics get good pay." He watched her carefully.

She lowered her eyes, rubbed at his calluses again. She shook her head slowly. "He doesn't want to go to space."

The clock clicked loudly in the closed room.

"I thought I ought to tell you, so you won't say anything to him about it," she added.

Old Donegal looked grayer than before. After a long silence, he rolled his head away and looked toward the limp curtains.

"Open the window, Martha," he said.

Her tongue clucked faintly as she started to protest, but she said nothing. After frozen seconds, she sighed and went to open it. The curtains billowed, and a babble of conversation blew in from the terrace of the Keith mansion. With the sound came the occasional brassy discord of a musician tuning his instrument. She clutched the window-sash as if she wished to slam it closed again.

"Well! Music!" grunted Old Donegal. "That's good. This is some shebang. Good whiskey and good music and you." He chuckled,

but it choked off into a fit of coughing.

"Donny, about Ken —"

"No matter, Martha," he said hastily. "Space-medic's pay is good."

"But Donny —" She turned from the window, stared at him briefly, then said, "Sure, Donny, sure," and came back to sit down by his bed.

He smiled at her affectionately. She was a man's woman, was Martha — always had been, still was. He had married her the year he had gone to space — a lissome, wistful, old fashioned lass, with big violet eyes and gentle hands and gentle thoughts — and she had never complained about the long and lonely weeks between blast-off and glide-down, when most spacer's wives listened to the psychiatrists and soap-operas and soon developed the symptoms that were expected of them, either because the symptoms were *chic*, or because they felt they should do something to earn the pity that was extended to them. "It's not so bad," Martha had assured him. "The house keeps me busy till Nora's home from school, and then there's a flock of kids around till dinner. Nights are a little empty, but if there's a moon, I can always go out on the porch and look at it and know where you are. And Nora gets out the telescope you built her, and we make a game of it. 'Seeing if

Daddy's still at the office' she calls it."

"Those 'were the days," he muttered.

"What, Donny?"

"Do you remember that Steve Farran song?"

She paused, frowning thoughtfully. There were a lot of Steve Farran songs, but after a moment she picked the right one, and sang it softly . . .

"O moon whereo'er the clouds fly,
Beyond the willow tree,
There is a ramblin' space guy
I wish you'd save for me."

"Mare Tranquilitatis,
O dark and tranquil sea,
Until he drops from heaven,
Rest him there with thee . . ."

Her voice cracked, and she laughed. Old Donegal chuckled weakly.

"Fried mush," he said. "That one made the cats wilt their ears and wail at the moon."

"I feel real crazy," he added. "Hand me the king kong, flummuff."

"Keep cool, Daddy-O, you've had enough." Martha reddened and patted his arm, looking pleased. Neither of them had talked that way, even in the old days, but the out-dated slang brought back memories — school parties, dances at the Rocketport

Club, the early years of the war when Donegal had jockeyed an R-43 fighter in the close-space assaults against the Soviet satellite project. The memories were good.

A brassy blare of modern "slide" arose suddenly from the Keith terrace as the small orchestra launched into its first number. Martha caught an angry breath and started toward the window.

"Leave it," he said. "It's a party. Whiskey, Martha. Please — just a small one."

She gave him a hurtful glance.

"Whiskey. Then you can call the priest."

"Donny, it's not right. You know it's not right — to bargain for such as that."

"All right. Whiskey. Forget the priest."

She poured it for him, and helped him get it down, and then went out to make the phone-call. Old Donegal lay shuddering over the whiskey taste and savoring the burn in his throat. Jesus, but it was good.

You old bastard, he thought, you got no right to enjoy life when nine-tenths of you is dead already, and the rest is foggy as a thermal dust-rise on the lunar maria at hell-dawn. But it wasn't a bad way to die. It ate your consciousness away from the feet up; it gnawed away the Present, but it let you keep the Past, until

everything faded and blended. Maybe that's what Eternity was, he thought — one man's subjective Past, all wrapped up and packaged for shipment, a single space-time entity, a one-man microcosm of memories, when nothing else remains.

"If I've got a soul, I made it myself," he told the gray nun at the foot of his bed.

The nun held out a pie pan, rattled a few coins in it. "Contribute to the Radiation Victims' Relief?" the nun purred softly.

"I know you," he said. "You're my conscience. You hang around the officer's mess, and when we get back from a sortie, you make us pay for the damage we did. But that was forty years ago."

The nun smiled, and her luminous eyes were on him softly. "Mother of God!" he breathed, and reached for the whiskey. His arm obeyed. The last drink had done him good. He had to watch his hand to see where it was going, and squeezed the neck until his fingers whitened so that he knew that he had it, but he got it off the table and onto his chest, and he got the cork out with his teeth. He had a long pull at the bottle, and it made his eyes water and his hands grow weak. But he got it back to the table without spilling a bit, and he was proud of himself.

The room was spinning like the cabin of a gyro-gravved ship. By

the time he wrestled it to a standstill, the nun was gone. The blare of music from the Keith terrace was louder, and laughing voices blended with it. Chairs scraping and glasses rattling. A fine party, Keith, I'm glad you picked today. This shebang would be the younger Keith's affair. Ronald Tonwyler Keith, III, scion of Orbital Engineering and Construction Company — builders of the moon-shuttle ships that made the run from the satellite station to Luna and back.

It's good to have such important neighbors, he thought. He wished he had been able to meet them while he was still up and about. But the Keith's place was walled-in, and when a Keith came out, he charged out in a limousine with a chauffeur at the wheel, and the iron gate closed again. The Keiths built the wall when the surrounding neighborhood began to grow shabby with age. It had once been the best of neighborhoods, but that was before Old Donegal lived in it. Now it consisted of sooty old houses and rented flats, and the Keith place was really not a part of it anymore. Nevertheless, it was really something when a pensioned blastman could say, "I live out close to the Keiths — you know, the *Ronald* Keiths." At least, that's what Martha always told him.

The music was so loud that he never heard the doorbell ring, but

when a lull came, he heard Nora's voice downstairs, and listened hopefully for Ken's. But when they came up, the boy was not with them.

"Hello, skinny-britches," he greeted his daughter.

Nora grinned and came over to kiss him. Her hair dangled about his face, and he noticed that it was blacker than usual, with the gray streaks gone from it again.

"You smell good," he said.

"You don't, Pops. You smell like a sot. Naughty!"

"Where's Ken?"

She moistened her lips nervously and looked away. "He couldn't come. He had to take a driver's lesson. He really couldn't help it. If he didn't go, he'd lose his turn, and then he wouldn't finish before he goes back to the academy." She looked at him apologetically.

"It's all right, Nora."

"If he missed it, he wouldn't get his copter license until summer."

"It's okay. Copters! Hell, the boy should be in jets by now!"

Several breaths passed in silence. She gazed absently toward the window and shook her head. "No jets, Pop. Not for Ken."

He glowered at her. "Listen! How'll he get into space? He's got to get his jet licenses first. Can't get in rockets without 'em."

Nora shot a quick glance at her mother. Martha rolled her eyes

as if sighing patiently. Nora went to the window to stare down toward the Keith terrace. She tucked a cigaret between scarlet lips, lit it, blew nervous smoke against the pane.

"Mom, can't you call them and have that racket stopped?"

"Donny says he likes it."

Nora's eyes flitted over the scene below. "Female butterflies and puppy-dogs in sport jackets. And the cadets." She snorted. "Cadets! Imagine Ron Keith the Third ever going to space. The old man buys his way into the academy, and they throw a brawl as if Ronny passed the Compets."

"Maybe he did," growled Old Donegal.

"Hah!"

"They live in a different world, I guess," Martha sighed.

"If it weren't for men like Pops, they'd never've made their fortune."

"I like the music, I tell you," grumbled the old man.

"I'm half-a-mind to go over there and tell them off," Nora murmured.

"Let them alone. Just so they'll stop the racket for blast-away."

"Look at them! — polite little pattern-cuts, all alike. They take pre-space, because it's the thing to do. Then they quit before the pay-off comes."

"How do you know they'll quit?"

"That party — I bet it cost

six months' pay, spacer's pay," she went on, ignoring him. "And what do real spacer's get? Oley gets killed, and Pop's pension wouldn't feed the Keith's cat."

"You don't understand, girl."

"I lost Oley. I understand enough."

He watched her silently for a moment, then closed his eyes. It was no good trying to explain, no good trying to tell her the dough didn't mean a damn thing. She'd been a spacer's wife, and that was bad enough, but now she was a spacer's widow. And Oley? Oley's tomb revolved around the sun in an eccentric orbit that spun-in close to Mercury, then reached out into the asteroid belt, once every 725 days. When it came within rocket radius of Earth, it whizzed past at close to fifteen miles a second.

You don't rescue a ship like that, skinny-britches, my darling daughter. Nor do you salvage it after the crew stops screaming for help. If you use enough fuel to catch it, you won't get back. You just leave such a ship there forever, like an asteroid, and it's a damn shame about the men trapped aboard. Heroes all, no doubt — but the smallness of the widow's monthly check failed to confirm the heroism, and Nora was bitter about the price of Oley's memory, perhaps.

Ouch! Old Donegal, you know

she's not like that. It's just that she can't understand about space. You ought to make her understand.

But did he really understand himself? You ride hot in a roaring blast-room, hands tense on the mixer controls and the pumps, eyes glued to instruments, body sucked down in a four-gravity thrust, and wait for the command to choke it off. Then you float free and weightless in a long nightmare as the beast coasts moonward, a flung javelin.

The "romance" of space — drivel written in the old days. When you're not blasting, you float in a cramped hotbox, crawl through dirty mazes of greasy pipe and cable to tighten a lug, scratch your arms and bark your shins, get sick and choked up because no gravity helps your gullet get the food down. Liquid is worse, but you gag your whiskey down because you have to.

Stars? — you see stars by squinting through a viewing lens, and it's like a photo-transparency, and if you aren't careful, you'll get an eyeful of Old Blinder and back off with a punch-drunk retina.

Adventure? — unless the skipper calls for course-correction, you float around in the blast-cubicle with damn little to do between blast-away and moon-down, except sweat out the omniscient accident statistics. If the beast

blows up or gets gutted in space, a statistic had your name on it, that's all, and there's no fighting back. You stay outwardly sane because you're a hog for punishment; if you weren't, you'd never get past the psychologists.

"Did you like horror movies when you were a kid?" asked the psych. And you'd damn well better answer "yes," if you want to go to space.

Tell her, old man, you're her pop. Tell her why it's worth it, if you know. You jail yourself in a coffin-size cubicle, and a crazy beast thunders berserk for uncontrollable seconds, and then you soar in ominous silence for the long long hours. Grow sweaty, filthy, sick, miserable, idle — somewhere out in Big Empty, where Man's got no business except the trouble he always makes for himself wherever he goes. Tell her why it's worth it, for pay less than a good bricklayer's. Tell her why Oley would do it again.

"It's a sucker's run, Nora," he said. "You go looking for kicks, but the only kicks you get to keep is what Oley got. God knows why — but it's worth it."

Nora said nothing. He opened his eyes slowly. Nora was gone. Had she been there at all?

He blinked around at the fuzzy room, and dissolved the shifting shadows that sometimes emerged

as old friendly faces, grinning at him. He found Martha.

"You went to sleep," said Martha. "She had to go. Kennie called. He'll be over later, if you're not too tired."

"I'm not tired. I'm all head. There's nothing much to get tired."

"I love you, Old Donegal."

"Hold my hand again."

"I'm holding it, old man."

"Then hold me where I can feel it."

She slid a thin arm under his neck, and bent over his face to kiss him. She was crying a little, and he was glad she could do it now without fleeing the room.

"Can I talk about dying now?" he wondered aloud.

She pinched her lips together and shook her head.

"I lie to myself, Martha. You know how much I lie to myself?"

She nodded slowly and stroked his gray temples.

"I lie to myself about Ken, and about dying. If Ken turned spacer, I wouldn't die — that's what I told myself. You know?"

She shook her head. "Don't talk, Donny, please."

"A man makes his own soul, Martha."

"That's not true. You shouldn't say things like that."

"A man makes his own soul, but it dies with him, unless he can pour it into his kids and his grandchildren before he goes. I lied to myself. Ken's a yellow-belly. Nora

made him one, and the boots won't fit."

"Don't, Donny. You'll excite yourself again."

"I was going to give him the boots — the over-boots with magnasoles. But they won't fit him. They won't ever fit him. He's a lily-livered lap-dog, and he whines. Bring me my boots, woman."

"Donny!"

"The boots, they're in my locker in the attic. I want them."

"What on earth!"

"Bring me my goddam space boots and put them on my feet. I'm going to wear them."

"You can't; the priest's coming."

"Well, get them anyway. What time is it? You didn't let me sleep through the moon-run blast, did you?"

She shook her head. "It's half an hour yet . . . I'll get the boots if you promise not to make me put them on you."

"I want them on."

"You can't, until Father Paul's finished."

"Do I have to get my feet buttered?"

She sighed. "I wish you wouldn't say things like that. I wish you wouldn't, Donny. It's sacrilege, you know it is."

"All right — 'annointed,'" he corrected wearily.

"Yes, you do."

"The boots, woman, the boots."

She went to get them. While she

was gone, the doorbell rang, and he heard her quick footsteps on the stairs, and then Father Paul's voice asking about the patient. Old Donegal groaned inwardly. After the priest, the doctor would come, at the usual time, to see if he were dead yet. The doctor had let him come home from the hospital to die, and the doctor was getting impatient. Why don't they let me alone? he growled. Why don't they let me handle it in my own way, and stop making a fuss over it? I can die and do a good job of it without a lot of outside interference, and I wish they'd quit picking at me with syringes and sacraments and enemas. All he wanted was a chance to listen to the orchestra on the Keith terrace, to drink the rest of his whiskey, and to hear the beast blast-away for the satellite on the first lap of the run to Luna.

It's going to be my last day, he thought. My eyes are going fuzzy, and I can't breathe right, and the throbbing's hurting my head. Whether he lived through the night wouldn't matter, because delirium was coming over him, and then there would be the coma, and the symbolic fight to keep him pumping and panting. I'd rather die tonight and get it over with, he thought, but they probably won't let me go.

He heard their voices coming up the stairs . . .

"Nora tried to get them to stop it, Father, but she couldn't get in to see anybody but the butler. He told her he'd tell Mrs. Keith, but nothing happened. It's just as loud as before."

"Well, as long as Donny doesn't mind—"

"He just says that. You know how he is."

"What're they celebrating, Martha?"

"Young Ronald's leaving — for pre-space training. It's a going-away affair." They paused in the doorway. The small priest smiled in at Donegal and nodded. He set his black bag on the floor inside, winked solemnly at the patient.

"I'll leave you two alone," said Martha. She closed the door and her footsteps wandered off down the hall.

Donegal and the young priest eyed each other warily.

"You look like hell, Donegal," the padre offered jovially. "Feeling nasty?"

"Skip the small talk. Let's get this routine over with."

The priest humphed thoughtfully, sauntered across to the bed, gazed down at the old man disinterestedly. "What's the matter? Don't want the 'routine'? Rather play it tough?"

"What's the difference?" he growled. "Hurry up and get out. I want to hear the beast blast off."

"You won't be able to," said the priest, glancing at the window,

now closed again. "That's quite a racket next door."

"They'd better stop for it. They'd better quiet down for it. They'll have to turn it off for five minutes or so."

"Maybe they won't."

It was a new idea, and it frightened him. He liked the music, and the party's gaiety, the nearness of youth and good times — but it hadn't occurred to him that it wouldn't stop so he could hear the beast.

"Don't get upset, Donegal. You know what a blast-off sounds like."

"But it's the last one. The last time. I want to hear."

"How do you know it's the last time?"

"Hell, don't I know when I'm kicking off?"

"Maybe, maybe not. It's hardly your decision."

"It's not, eh?" Old Donegal fumed. "Well, bigawd you'd think it wasn't. You'd think it was Martha's and yours and that damfool medic's. You'd think I got no say-so. Who's doing it anyway?"

"I would guess," Father Paul grunted sourly, "that Providence might appreciate His fair share of the credit."

Old Donegal made a surly noise and hunched his head back into the pillow to glower.

"You want me?" the priest asked. "Or is this just a case of

wifely conscience?"

"What's the difference? Give me the business and scram."

"No soap. Do you want the sacrament, or are you just being kind to your wife? If it's for Martha, I'll go *now*."

Old Donegal glared at him for a time, then wilted. The priest brought his bag to the bedside.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned."

"Bless you, son."

"I accuse myself . . ."

Tension, anger, helplessness — they had piled up on him, and now he was feeling the after-effects. Vertigo, nausea, and the black confetti — a bad spell. The whiskey — if he could only reach the whiskey. Then he remembered he was receiving a Sacrament, and struggled to get on with it. Tell him, old man, tell him of your various rottennesses and vile transgressions, if you can remember some. A sin is whatever you're sorry for, maybe. But Old Donegal, you're sorry for the wrong things, and this young jesuitical gadget wouldn't like listening to it. I'm sorry I didn't get it instead of Oley, and I'm sorry I fought in the war, and I'm sorry I can't get out of this bed and take a belt to my daughter's backside for making a puny whelp out of Ken, and I'm sorry I gave Martha such a rough time all these years — and wound up dying in a cheap flat,

instead of giving her things like the Keith's had. I wish I had been a sharpster, contractor, or thief . . . instead of a common laboring spacer, whose species lost its glamor after the war.

Listen, old man, you made your soul yourself, and it's yours. This young dispenser of oils, Substances, and mysteries wishes only to help you scrape off the rough edges and gouge out the bad spots. He will not steal it, nor distort it with his supernatural chisels, nor make fun of it. He can take nothing away, but only cauterize and neutralize, he says, so, why not let him try? Tell him the rotten messes.

"Are you finished, my son?"

Old Donegal nodded wearily, and said what he was asked to say, and heard the soft mutter of Latin that washed him inside and behind his ghostly ears . . . *ego te abservo in Nomine Patris . . .* and he accepted the rest of it lying quietly in the candlelight and the red glow of the sunset through the window, while the priest anointed him and gave him Bread, and read the words of the soul in greeting its Spouse: "I was asleep, but my heart waked; it is the voice of my beloved calling: come to me my love, my dove, my undefiled . . ." and from beyond the closed window came the sarcastic wail of a clarinet painting hot slides against a rhythmic background.

It wasn't so bad, Old Donegal thought when the priest was done. He felt like a schoolboy in a starched shirt on Sunday morning, and it wasn't a bad feeling, though it left him weak.

The priest opened the window for him again, and repacked his bag. "Ten minutes till blast-off," he said. "I'll see what I can do about the racket next door."

When he was gone, Martha came back in, and he looked at her face and was glad. She was smiling when she kissed him, and she looked less tired.

"Is it all right for me to die now?" he grunted.

"Donny, don't start that again."

"Where's the boots? You promised to bring them?"

"They're in the hall. Donny, you don't want them."

"I want them, and I want a drink of whiskey, and I want to hear them fire the beast." He said it slow and hard, and he left no room for argument.

When she had got the huge boots over his shrunken feet, the magnasoles clanged against the iron bed-frame and clung there, and she rolled him up so that he could look at them, and Old Donegal chuckled inside. He felt warm and clean and pleasantly dizzy.

"The whiskey, Martha, and for God's sake, make them stop the noise till after the firing. Please!"

She went to the window and looked out for a long time. Then
(Continued on page 130)

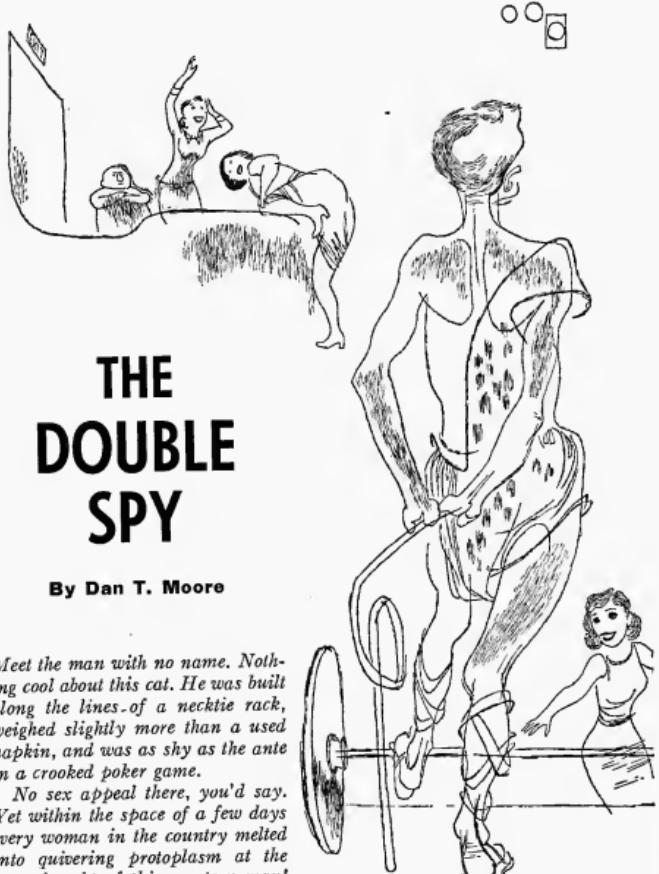


THE DOUBLE SPY

By Dan T. Moore

Meet the man with no name. Nothing cool about this cat. He was built along the lines of a necktie rack, weighed slightly more than a used napkin, and was as shy as the ante in a crooked poker game.

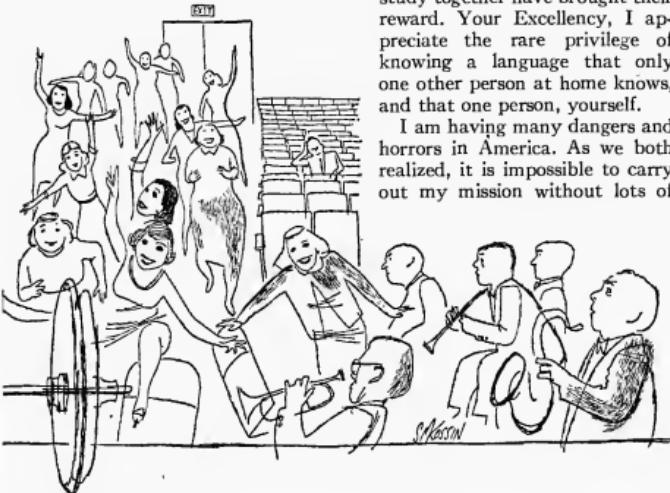
No sex appeal there, you'd say. Yet within the space of a few days every woman in the country melted into quivering protoplasm at the very thought of this mystery man!



DEAR EXCELLENCY:

The communicating time will be here soon. I have started this letter early to be sure it will be ready. This is the first time I have felt safe when communicating with you. Our enemies at home can solve such extraordinarily complex ciphers that I have always been uneasy before. They cannot possibly solve an entirely new language like this one; a language based on an utterly different theory from our own; with new symbols; and even set down with a different writing instrument. Our long periods of study together have brought their reward. Your Excellency, I appreciate the rare privilege of knowing a language that only one other person at home knows, and that one person, yourself.

I am having many dangers and horrors in America. As we both realized, it is impossible to carry out my mission without lots of



their money. I could not even begin my work, nor buy the expensive equipment needed for my experiments without finding a way to make money.

In only a few weeks I discovered the quickest and easiest way to do it was to become an entertainer. The people here like to be shocked and astonished. Naturally I am well equipped to do both. I was an immediate sensation. I got into what New Yorkers call "The Big Time."

Each night at 8:30 I went to a theatre in a place called Times Square and put on my act. Thousands of people paid to see me. I was very well paid. There is a newspaper here called "Variety." It carried an article about me. The headline said: STRONG MAN TERRIF WOW SOCKEROO 100G 3D. The numbers at the end mean the theatre took in \$100,000 during my third week. After the article appeared every seat was sold weeks in advance.

You will be amused, Excellency, when you hear what I did in this show. I came out on the stage practically nude except for an abbreviated leopard skin. I walked over to a pile of iron rods. They were half-inch concrete reinforcing bars about six feet long. I picked one out and dropped it on the floor. It made a terrible crash. This was to prove to the audience that it was real. Then

I wrapped it around my neck and tied it in a regular four-in-hand necktie knot. It was a little hard to get the ends to come out even. I had to pull and haul to arrange them just right. This caused tremendous laughter. They knew no one could do this with an iron reinforcing bar. They were sure it was a trick.

I chose the man in the audience who was laughing the loudest and asked him to come up on the stage. With a little persuasion he did so. I selected another iron bar and wrapped it around his neck. Then I tied it in a four-in-hand knot and adjusted the ends until they were perfect. I asked him to take the necktie off. He grabbed it with both hands and tried. His face turned purple with effort, but of course he could not even budge it. Everyone laughed loudly. Finally twenty men from the audience volunteered to help. They all started pulling and hauling. They couldn't get the iron necktie off. Then the audience became silent. They looked at each other uneasily. There were frightened whispers.

That was the time to break the tension. I would spit on the floor. As my saliva hit the stage it burst into flames and a smell of perfume drifted through the theatre. It was my turn to look surprised and scared. Everyone howled with laughter, and the

tension was broken for all but the man with the iron necktie who remained forlorn and miserable. Finally I removed his necktie and let it drop to the floor. It made a tremendous crash. Everyone was impressed all over again.

Next I grasped a horizontal bar and chinned myself fifty times with one hand. Again everyone became silent. They all knew no one has ever done that before. In many ways they are like us. For example, when they get scared their body heat rises like ours. As the heat came up to me from the audience I could feel the change in my sensors. It made my chin warm. I found that when my chin got warm it was time to break the tension. I did it by demonstrating magic tricks.

You will smile, Excellency, when you hear what they call magic here. I was tightly blindfolded. Some people came up on the stage, and I announced exactly how many there were. I pointed to exactly where each one was standing, and indicated which were males and which were females. This made a most tremendous impression. I could hear gasps in the audience. I was told that the people rubbed their eyes as if they could not believe what they were seeing. You will understand, Excellency, that I accomplished this by turning on the male principle. The

women here are so exquisitely receptive to it that when it is on their excitement causes changes in their body heat. It was simple for me to sense those fluctuations in temperature and to know which of the people before me were female.

Next I put a piece of paper on a metal rack across the stage. I concentrated heat waves on it from my cupped hand. The paper burst into flames. As they say here on the street they call Broadway, that "brought down the house." They clapped and whistled and made me do it again and again. Luckily they conceived of it only as a wonderful trick.

I ended the act by choosing a very unusual looking man from the audience. He came up on stage and we went behind a screen together. When we reappeared a few seconds later the audience screamed because I had twisted my face around to look exactly like his. Believe me, the reaction was terrific. Slowly I let my face slip back to "normal." If they realized there is no normal and that I could leave my face that way permanently, that would have been too much of a shock. They would have become silent and terrified and suspicious. I might have been in danger.

I had to calculate carefully how much these people could take without realizing there was some-

thing alarmingly different about me. I learned my lesson one night. I turned on the male principle too strongly and some of the women in the audience became very agitated. Everyone was embarrassed. After the show the theatre manager came to my dressing room and asked me to have a drink with him at a little bar across the street.

When we sat down he stared at me in a queer manner. "Just exactly what happened tonight?" he demanded.

I looked surprised. "Weren't you satisfied with the act?" I asked. "The audience seemed to like me."

"They liked you too much."

I laughed. "You mean those silly females who tried to drag me off the stage?"

He narrowed his eyes and thrust his face close to mine. "If I hadn't had the best-trained ushers in New York there'd have been a panic and a riot in there. How come?"

I shrugged. "The women in your town seem remarkably excitable."

"And in *your* town?"

"Not so," I declared truthfully. How truthfully Your Excellency well knows.

"There's something peculiar about you," he said, "something very peculiar." He leaned back in his chair and his glance swept

over me. "Suppose you cut out the leopard skin," he said, "and wear a jersey and trousers."

I laughed to myself. He thought my bare body, my bulging muscles had been the cause of the trouble. What a fool! Is Your Excellency laughing too? However, I dared not disagree with him. By that time he had had many drinks. He was looking mean. He reached over and grabbed the lapel of my coat in his fist.

"What the hell kind of a guy are you?" he snarled at me.

My hands twitched. I wished I could have picked him up and tied him in a four-in-hand knot around his own neck.

"Who the hell are you?" he repeated.

I yawned and stretched and got to my feet. "Not even a strong man now," I said casually, "just a tired man."

I left the bar.

After that incident I was careful with the male principle. When the audience left each night I turned it on very slightly — only enough to be sure that the women would do their best to get back to see me again.

But before I go any further in this account of my adventures, Your Excellency, let me tell you about the women here. The greatest difference between the Americans and ourselves is in the women. They are extraordinary. Some of them are beautiful be-

yond belief. My researches completely confirm your much-criticized hypotheses concerning our own women. If our enemies who object so strongly to Your Excellency's statements could be here for only one hour they would become your devoted supporters. American women are the proof that your theories are correct. Your famous attempt to explain some of the incongruous and apparently ridiculous passages in our ancient manuscripts by assuming the existence of a now-vanished female principle is irrefutably demonstrated by these women, Your Excellency.

Here, the female principle exists, and as you predicted, most of the women are therefore entirely different from ours. The term used in this language is "femininity." It is a devastatingly attractive thing — but almost impossible to explain. I will make an attempt.

Senseless, reasonless, even foolish motions of the body and the hands, the expressions of the eyes and the mouth, the way the head is moved and tilted are a part of it. So are unusual tones of the voice and special ways in which things are said. Laughter, a whisper, the direction of the glance, the fingers' pressure — these, too, are parts of it.

There are infinitely various types of adornment which hang on the body, fabrics in delicate

or brilliant colors which cling and flow, gleaming stones at throat and wrists. The faces are enchantingly painted, the hair shining and arranged in numerous wonderful designs. There is an aura of the scent of flowers and fruits.

I tell you, Excellency, everything about this femininity assails the senses. It is so potent that once having experienced it the mere recollection causes the pulses to pound and throb. My hand trembles as I write these words to you. I am confused and disturbed and wild with a longing I never knew at home. I wish to meet Your Excellency's high standards in preparing this report, and yet I am unable to be scientific. The logic of the laboratory cannot be employed.

As soon as I could I began to hunt desperately for the secret of the female principle. I analyzed the soil, the food, the water, and the air by our own most refined methods. I found nothing to help us. I went to the risky extreme of killing two of their women. One possessed an unusual amount of this femininity. The other, who seemed to have very little of it, was essentially like one of our own women. *There was not the slightest chemical difference in their bodies.* Dead, they were precisely the same. But alive, Your Excellency, they were overwhelmingly dissimilar.

I was able to kill the unfeminine one scientifically without emotion or regret. But, although it was clearly my duty, I could hardly bring myself to kill the other one. I had known her for several days. Her femininity almost prevented my continuing with the experiment. She told me that she loved me.

I don't know if I have the skill to explain to you what this "love" is. Briefly, it means that the woman was in a mental state — a receptive mental state, Excellency, infinitely more violent than the peak our women reach after intensive application of the male principle. Your Excellency, *she was that way all of the time.*

This brings me to another extraordinary difference between them and us. The men here lack the male principle. They obviously don't need it because of the existence of the female principle in the women. If the men had it, as we have, I leave it to Your Excellency's vivid imagination as to what would be happening here.

In general the men are enough like us to be called humanoids in our sense of the word. They have about the same intelligence quotient that we have, and are physically almost identical except for our induced modifications. As Your Excellency predicted they do not have these since they have not yet discovered the

methods of inducing them. As a result, while they have the same muscular potential as we do, they are far weaker, and their life span is not more than 70 or 80 years by their calendar.

They do not have heat sensors, so they stumble around in the dark and trip over things like children. They squander more energy on electric lights than on anything else in the economy. Also, their hearing and eyesight cannot be compared to ours. I am always hearing and seeing things without their suspecting it. A low conversation across the room is perfectly audible to me. Much of my best information comes this way. Naturally, since they completely lack heat generators, they cannot set things on fire.

To get back to the account of my activities, Excellency; my biggest mistake was in killing the two women for the femininity research. This got me into terrible trouble. They feel strongly about killing women here. Now that I appreciate their women, I can see why.

The local police were not hard to handle, but they have a central police system called the F.B.I. It is comparable to Your Excellency's organization in techniques and training, and in some ways even superior to it. When the F.B.I. started investigating me, things got serious immediately.

One day my heat sensor detected a man standing outside my front door. He was a huge bulky man. I sensed a mass under his left arm pit. My heat sensor analyzed it. It reflected heat like iron, but there seemed to be some small pieces of lead there too.

The man was polite and apologetic when I opened the door. He tipped his hat. He said that he had come to the wrong apartment. Then he asked, "How did you know I was standing outside the door?"

Without thinking, I uttered the first thing that came into my head. "I saw your shadow."

His eyes widened only slightly. He had good control of himself. "How could you see a shadow through a wooden door?" he asked softly.

I was exasperated at my mistake but I smiled the way people here do when they are at a disadvantage. "I do not explain my tricks," I told him. "I earn my living by performing them at the theatre."

I closed the door.

The next night I was experimenting with the male principle. I sat on a bench in a place called Central Park and practiced on the women as they went by. I discovered that the more feminine the women the greater the effect the wave has on them. Some would hesitate and look around as they walked by me. Some

would stop and stare at me in a puzzled fashion. I was growing tired and ravenously hungry. I decided that when the next attractive woman passed me I would generate one last powerful wave, and then go on to a restaurant.

I allowed a few unfeminine ones to go by. Then I saw her, a lovely blonde girl about twenty-five years old. Her hair was a mass of short curls that covered her head with a uniform thickness like the styles in our Second Renaissance Period. She had on a black dress and was carrying a black bag in her hand. I sensed small pieces of different types of metals in her bag. She was walking slowly and weeping. Occasionally she dabbed at her nose with a piece of white cloth.

She was so beautiful, Excellency. Her warmth started flowing over my chin when she was at least sixty feet away. I decided to wait until she was quite close and then to engulf her with the full force of the male principle. I was shaken and impatient. Even at the highest point of excitement, though, Your Excellency should know that the importance of my mission was in my mind. When she was on the sidewalk directly in front of me I did as I had planned. She stopped. Her handkerchief dropped to the ground, and then her bag. She

looked at me wildly. She ran over and sat on the bench beside me. She put her arms around my neck and kissed me.

"Why were you crying?" I asked.

"I don't remember," she said.
"I don't care."

I closed my eyes. My senses were responding to her warmth and her scent. Suddenly there was a blast of male heat on my chin. I started and stared. There standing above us was the huge heavy man of the night before. The mass of metal was still under his left arm pit. He had an odd expression on his face. He was watching the girl as if her condition was answering a question for him.

In a sudden flash of intuition everything was clear to me. The girl was a decoy. I had fallen neatly into a trap. I had thoughtlessly demonstrated my power to the F.B.I. man—a power I could not explain by saying it was a trick.

I pushed the girl away and stood up. The man's eyes were fixed upon me with horror. I saw that he knew there was something monstrous and menacing about me. Something he did not understand. Something that meant terrible danger to him and his kind. His right hand started to creep towards the mass of metal under his arm. I cupped my hand towards him and started

accumulating a heat charge. His glance dropped fearfully. It fell to my hand, and his temperature went up. He had undoubtedly seen me burn pieces of paper in the theatre.

His right hand fumbled in his pocket and he drew out a little package. "Have a cigarette?"

I shook my head. He put one in his own mouth and lighted a match. In spite of the strongest effort of my will I jumped back. I jerked my hand up over my chin. A little stick of wood with a flaring flame on the end of at least 600 degrees Centigrade, right in front of my heat sensors, took my breath away. The searing heat burned right into my brain. It was like some of the tortures in Your Excellency's Force Number Five.

The heavy man observed all of this, but he did not understand it. He looked at the girl, who had risen and was leaning against me, oblivious of everything.

"You've got quite a way with women, haven't you?" he said. He dragged on his cigarette. The tip flamed up painfully. I shrank back and again brought my hand up to protect my chin.

"What's the matter with you?" the man asked sharply.

I did not know how to answer. I stood mute and waiting.

"I want to go now, and I want to take that girl with me. Do you understand?" The man's

voice was harsh with anger.

I shut the principle off. The girl lifted her head, but she appeared to be in a trance. The man took her arm and they walked off through the park. A murderous rage against the heavy man filled me. I cupped my hand. He was well within range — but then I thought of my mission, Excellency, and let him go. For hours afterwards that lovely girl who was taken from me was in my thoughts.

Your Excellency, two suggestions come out of this experience. They both concern our induced modifications. Any of us who come to America should be able to shut off the heat sensor at will. With everyone here smoking and lighting cigarettes and turning on 300-watt light bulbs in one's face, with automobiles approaching at night shooting out two searing heat beams in front of them, the environment is too full of shocks. It is too easy for us to be spotted because of this weakness.

Also, Your Excellency, a change must be made in the connection between all of the induced modifications. When I accumulate a heat charge, that means that the male principle is automatically on. When I was accumulating a charge to kill the heavy man, the principle was affecting the woman, and she was reacting to

it. The combination was not desirable at that time. When I light the paper at the theatre, the male principle is also on, and affects the women in the audience. We can use the male principle without using the heat ray. Why can't we use the heat ray without using the male principle? This modification should be induced.

The next afternoon there was a matinee performance at the theatre. It was crowded. The management had even provided for standing room at the back of the theatre. I started, as usual, by selecting an iron reinforcing bar and tying it into a four-in-hand around my neck.

To my surprise, although it looked exactly the same, it was much harder to bend. I never did get the ends quite even.

I had just put the second bar around the neck of the stooge from the audience when I noticed something queer. Although this was usually the place for hilarious laughter, everyone was silent. I looked out over the audience. A man was standing in the aisle, just a few feet from the stage. He was pointing a gun right at me. It was the heavy man.

As I turned around he said, "Put up your hands."

I put them up.

He spoke in a loud, deep voice, "This is no gag, ladies and gentlemen. This man on the stage is the most dangerous and cold-

blooded murderer in America. He is the murderer of Lydia Davis and Genevieve Scott."

Several other men stood up. They all had masses of metal under their left arm pits. The heavy man gave them an order. "Go up on the stage and handcuff him. Use five pairs of handcuffs."

Then he spoke to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, today we substituted tempered steel bars for the reinforcing bars. Twenty ordinary men couldn't have bent one of those bars. What you have witnessed was no trick. The man you see on the stage is not like us. He has the strength of at least forty men. Please remain in your seats. We can handle this situation."

The audience gasped and murmured. A woman screamed.

The group of men started walking towards the stage. My hands were up. I cupped my right one and gave the heavy man a full charge of heat. His hair went up in a bright orange flame. He dropped the red hot gun from his smoking hand, and fell to the floor. He frantically rolled around the aisle trying to put out his flaming clothes.

One of the other men shot at me. The little piece of lead came toward me, flew over my shoulder. It was going at about 900 feet per second. This was enough to kill me, Excellency. I became

panic-stricken. I fled into the wings. I was followed by a storm of little whistling lead pellets.

The stagehands scattered hysterically before me as I ran down the steps and out the stage door entrance. The street in front of the theatre was packed with police cruisers and athletic-looking men in blue uniforms.

Before anyone saw me, I cupped my hand, and fired the gas tank of the nearest police cruiser. The ray of the male principle went out with the heat ray. As I ran by the flaming car, all of the women in the street felt something important. They all turned and looked at me.

Policemen started shooting. They piled out of their cars. The street was echoing with yells and shouts. I was terrified. I exerted an enormous effort of will and mustered every atom of energy at my command. I sent a full-power heat blast up the street. I have never marshalled a bigger blast, even in the contests at our training school in Area Twelve.

Fifteen automobiles burst into flames. Twenty or thirty men and women fell screaming to the sidewalk, their clothes burning. A flock of roasted pigeons fell smoking out of the sky. A black cloud condensed over the street, and a forked tongue of lightning flashed from it. Every woman

within a quarter of a mile felt the hot electrical force of the male principle. I dived into the Times Square subway entrance and sprinted down the stairs. There was a men's washroom at the end of the platform.

I heard the wild tumult of pursuit behind me. I pushed open the door. A man was there washing his hands. I strangled him, tore off his clothes, and put them on myself. Hastily, I twisted my face about so that I looked like an entirely different person. I opened the door and started walking slowly back down the platform.

A platoon of policemen with drawn guns was sprinting down the platform towards me. They were followed by a yelling mob of civilians which included hundreds of women. They swept by me. I was safe, but shivering with fear, Excellency. I was spent. I couldn't have mustered up a heat ray strong enough to warm the end of my nose.

I stumbled around the corner and away from that neighborhood. Then I went into the first restaurant I saw, and gorged. After a five dollar plank steak, three glasses of milk, one glass of beer, and apple pie a la mode I was still ravenous; still energy-minus.

I went a block up the street, into another restaurant, and bolted down exactly the same

meal again. Strength started to flow slowly through my veins. After one more meal in still another restaurant, my confidence returned.

The newspapers handled the affair with amazing restraint. The facts brought in by their reporters naturally sounded fantastic to the editors, so they rearranged them to "make sense." The reticence of the authorities, particularly the F.B.I., helped to convert what might have caused a national panic into just an unusually spectacular chase after an escaped murderer. The burning cars were laid to hooliganism on the part of the bystanders. The people who got burned, so the stories explained, were hurt by the gasoline explosions of the burning cars. The mass hysteria of the women was caused by the excitement. The papers said that the steel necktie worn by my stooge at the theatre had to be cut off by a water-cooled electric saw. They said that however I did it, it was a clever trick.

The next few days, Your Excellency, were the most difficult of my stay here. I knew that the full power of not only the F.B.I., but of the whole national government, would be concentrated to destroy me. I had to hide — hide, and get a new start.

The money in the pockets of my borrowed suit didn't last long. I couldn't possibly risk presenting

myself as a strong man or a magician again. I became a ditch digger and a day laborer, and finally drifted into the professional wrestling racket. Many of the top wrestling promoters live in Washington, D. C. I rented a little white clapboard house with green shutters, out in the country beyond Silver Springs, Maryland.

I was careful to keep myself a second-rate wrestler. This was exasperating, Your Excellency. At any time I could have beaten three or four of their best wrestlers simultaneously. Everything was fixed so I won and lost when they told me to. We even practiced how we were going to win or lose before each match. I was very obedient and very scared.

I did everything *not* to attract attention. I started to use the male principle again, but so sparingly that everything looked natural.

I tried to fit into the life of the community and become an American. I joined a Bowling League. I learned to play a game called "Canasta."

I got to be great friends with a man named Nat Brown, an automobile mechanic. He lived with his extraordinarily beautiful wife, Helene, in a house about a half mile away.

The Browns used to ask me to dinner, and I would meet their friends. I grew very fond of them.

We would sit around and drink beer and play cards and talk until late at night about politics and philosophy and love and everything else on earth. It was by far the swiftest part of my education in America, living with these lighthearted, charming people who obviously liked me.

The only disadvantage was the problem raised by my increasing fondness for Helene Brown. She was a vivid incarnation of the female principle, and yet I knew I must not touch her. I had a constant battle with myself to maintain the disinterested relationship necessary to continuing with these people without complication.

Both Nat and Helene Brown used to come to see me wrestle whenever I had a match in Washington. Whether I won or lost we would go out and drink beer together. I would sometimes bring another girl along. More and more I started to feel like a real native American. A couple of close friends, Excellency, did a lot for your humble servant.

Three days ago I was riding along Connecticut Avenue in my new car. When I stopped for a light, I saw a familiar face in the crowd crossing the street. It was the tall heavy man, the F.B.I. agent who had tracked me down and tried to capture me in the theatre the night of the big battle. I could sense the mass of

metal carried under his left arm.

He was hurrying along with another man. When I saw who it was my blood froze in my veins. It was my neighbor, Nat Brown. He also had a mass of metal under his left arm.

It was clear to me then that, in spite of my precautions, the F.B.I. had spotted me weeks ago. How, I do not know. Nat Brown was their surveillance agent.

I drove home immediately to finish this letter and get it off to you. I may not be alive tomorrow. The launching apparatus is concealed in a tool shed about a half a mile behind the house. I am going to put down my recommendations and get this off immediately — before it's too late.

As I see it, Excellency, there are only four courses available to us:

- (1) A chemical or other isolation of the female principle, followed by an attempt to synthesize it at home to see what its effect would be on our women. This might save us. Unfortunately I have yet been able to isolate what causes the female principle here; so this is not a possibility yet.
- (2) Kidnap some of their women. This would be delightful fun for Your Excellency and a few others; but it would not solve the main problem.

Transportation difficulties would make it impossible to get enough of them. Also, if the basic element which creates the "female principle" is lacking because of some soil or other deficiency at home, their women would soon become like ours. All of our trouble would go for nothing, and our doom would continue to approach.

- (3) Conquer them, kill the men, take their women, and live with the women here. This, in my opinion, should not be attempted for the following reasons. Americans are extraordinarily efficient in warfare. They have atomic and hydrogen weapons, and they know how to use them. They are very warlike, although they constantly deny it. Some of their other weapons are fully equal to ours, in some respects, superior. Our communications would be far too long to enable us to prevail. This should be attempted only if the fourth alternative fails; and even then only after long expensive preparation. Also, there is distinct danger if we disclose ourselves by attacking them. They may find a way to attack us, and cause considerable damage. As things are now, with our vanishing birth rate, we can't afford to lose people in a war.

(4) The fourth alternative is to breed their race out of existence by planting our blood here — in other words, an invasion from within. This will depend upon our two races being inter-fertile. I am almost certain that they are. If I can stay alive for seven months longer I will give you a definite report. I will carry on the experiment as swiftly as possible.

Since these people have such a short life span our descendants will live hundreds of years longer than theirs. The present race will slowly be bred out due to the infirmities of its men. Our men and their women will create a race superior to both.

If I can find a way to escape from the F.B.I., and establish myself once more in safety I will try to justify Your Excellency's confidence in your humble servant.

I put the letter down on my desk. It certainly told most of the story. It needed only a final paragraph. Then I sat down at the typewriter and added it:

I am closing now, Your Excellency. Tomorrow will be the transmission date for this letter. I may not communicate with you again for some time, but please understand, Excellency, that I am your humble and devoted servant and have tried

to carry on in strict accordance with your wishes.

I put the letter into an envelope and put it in my pocket. Then I got into my car and drove down through the city to the northwest wing of the Department of Justice Building. The elevator girl smiled. "Haven't seen you for a long time, Nat. Don't you work for the F.B.I. any more?"

I smiled back at her, "The Chief has had me up to a lot of out-of-town devilment."

I passed Jack and Tex in the hall, and we waved to each other. They wanted to talk, but I was in too much of a hurry. "The Chief wants me," I said, without slowing down.

When I reached the Chief's office Mrs. Sperling gave me a broad grin. "Hello, Nat. The Chief's been waiting for you."

I went down the little corridor into the Chief's room. He was sitting at his desk looking grim and tense. On the wall behind him was a huge map of the United States. It had clumps of vari-colored pins all over it. His deep voice boomed across the room.

"Hello, Nat. How is the Chief of the Venusian Desk?"

"Well, if you want to know the truth, Chief, I'm pretty god damned relieved. Some jobs are fun. But my hair has been standing on end so much since you gave me this job that it's going

to need about a year's rest. No man wants his hair to have a nervous breakdown."

The Chief looked at me fondly. "Well, I can't say you carried your mission out quietly. It practically blew me out of bed, and I live at least ten miles away."

"Joe did a hell of a good job with the TNT," I said. "How the hell he ever got twenty tons of it down in the basement in three hours I'll never find out."

A slight frown came over the Chief's face. "Are you sure our Venusian friend was there?"

"Absolutely."

"How — absolutely?"

"I called him on the telephone. When he answered I pressed the button. I heard the explosion over the wire, half a second before it practically tore down my own house. When I got over there a big crowd was collecting." I took a deep breath. "Not much for them to look at, though — just a big black smoking hole in the ground."

"And our inter-planetary friend?"

"Well, I don't know about his soul, Chief, but his body isn't around anywhere. I guess it just turned into steam with the rest of the house. A lot of women are going to be sad as hell."

I saw the Chief's fists clenched on the desk. He was still taut from the strain of the last few hours. Finally he reached for the

silver cigarette box on his desk. His fingers jerked crazily as he put a cigarette in his mouth. He passed the box to me. I took one and started fumbling in my pockets for a match. The Chief snapped open the top of his big desk lighter, and held it over to me. I put the cigarette into the flame and drew deeply. The flame was at least three inches high. The Chief leaned forward, his eyes riveted on me. There was a queer, expectant look on his face. I stared back at him, puzzled. Finally he snapped the lighter shut, and turned to the wall. "It's all right, boys," he said.

A door with grillework along the front opened up. I saw Joe Evans and Tom Hardy and Jim Reid standing there with tommy guns, pointed right at my head.

The Chief laughed at my expression of bewilderment.

"I wasn't taking any chances, Nat. You can't afford to in a situation like this. No matter how sure you are, you can't gamble the whole future of your own world. I wanted to be damned certain that you really were Nat Brown, and not His Excellency's humble servant from the planet Venus. If you had flinched so much as one eyelash, Nat, when I held that lighter up to your face, three tommy guns would have opened up on you — all at

one and the same time."

I felt suddenly limp. I uttered a long audible whistle of relief.

The Chief's voice was low and solemn. "Think what we've escaped, Nat — think how close he came to getting loose on our world!"

I took the letter out and threw it on his desk. "After you read this, Chief, you'll appreciate it a little more. The last paragraph is mine. I picked up the letter while the boys were loading the TNT down in the basement."

While the Chief was reading the letter I got up and looked at the map of the United States behind him. Each of the colored pinheads had names printed on them. Grouped around Silver Springs, Maryland, were two pins. One was labeled "Chief." The other was labeled "Nat Brown." I turned to the Chief. "I wish you would do one thing for me."

"I'll do anything for you."

"Instead of calling us 'Chief' and 'Nat Brown,' call us 'Excellency' and 'Your Humble Servant.'"

The Chief chuckled. "There has never been any humor on that board, and by God, it's high time there was." He rang the buzzer. "Mrs. Sperling, change the 'Chief' and 'Nat Brown' pins to 'Excellency' and 'Your Humble Servant.'"

Her eyes widened a bit, but

the labels were changed on the spot.

When the Chief got to that part about the recommendations he read them out loud. Then he began to pace the room.

"Nat," he said, "I'm going to see that you get some very special recognition for the job you have done. I mean recognition from the White House itself. Of course we can't give it any publicity — at least not yet — but it will mean a lot more money for you."

"Thanks, Chief, I can use it."

"In your opinion, what should we do now, as our next step?" He paused. "Or should we just do nothing?"

"I think we've got to be careful that they don't send anyone else down here. Or maybe it is 'up' here. We've got to get messages back to his 'Excellency' every once in a while from 'Your Humble Servant.' I know how to do it now. The launching tube is still intact in its shed. There are ten rockets, so we can send at least ten messages. Time plays in our favor — since they have apparently lost the ability to reproduce themselves, they are dying out. If we can hold them off for a long enough period, we'll be safe forever. The most important thing, Chief, is to be sure we know it if they land any more 'humble servants' on the earth."

The Chief nodded approval.
"How can we make sure we'll know it?"

"It's hard to make absolutely sure, but why not send me out on a roving mission to set up an international organization to detect such a creature? What we want is information about anyone, anywhere, who is unusually strong or unusually attractive to women, or eats six or eight meals a day, or who has the other queer powers they have. I could get all the information coming in from all over the world, process it here, and only bother you when we found something suspicious."

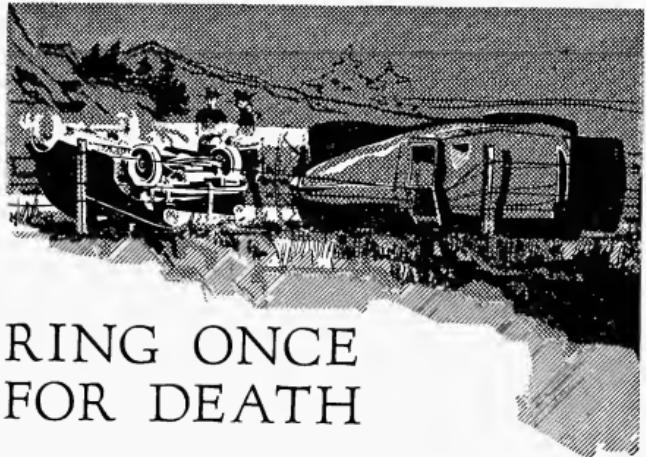
The Chief was enthusiastic.
"You've thought yourself up a job, Nat. Take three weeks vacation to get yourself rested up, and then get started."

I walked down the long marble corridors away from the Chief's office, and went down in the elevator and out into the street. As I walked along in the crowds I felt the warmth of bodies as they passed me. I suddenly realized the novacaine was beginning to wear off. I didn't get out any too soon. My chin ached and throbbed. That hot searing flame had come so close . . . from now on my nightmares would be of that moment when the Chief was holding the lighter to my cigarette. But one thing sang through my being; the battle

was won. In a month my world travels for the F.B.I. would start.

Like a phoenix, I, the new Nat Brown, had risen re-born from the ashes of the Nat Brown vaporized by the explosion. What could his thoughts have been, lying tied up on the living room floor waiting for twenty tons of TNT to go off? Waiting, while I held the mirror in front of me and slowly made my face into an exact replica of his. He must have known then that I would get his job, and get his wife, Helene, and finally get his world. He realized then that His Excellency would send down hundreds more like me and that I would be the screen between them and the F.B.I., that I would instruct them and encourage them and give them aid and safety for their missions.

As I neared the Cathedral I looked west on Massachusetts Avenue. The sun had just set and the Evening Star was hanging like a lantern in the sky — my homeland, the radiant planet which men on earth call Venus. Venus, they have told me, means love. What a superb and cosmic joke that is! I looked at the beautiful orb on the horizon and was filled with the triumphant excitement of being the earthman, Nat Brown, of going home to my wife, Helene, one of the thousands who would breed thousands who would breed thousands.



RING ONCE FOR DEATH

BY ROBERT ARTHUR

The power of the old gods was certainly nothing for Mark and Edith—a modern, twentieth-century couple—to worry about. After all—everybody dies!

TWENTY YEARS had left no trace inside Sam Kee's little shop on Mott Street. There were the same dusty jars of ginseng root and tigers' whiskers, the same little bronze Buddahs, the same gim-cracks mixed with fine jade. Edith Williams gave a little murmur of pleasure as the door shut behind them.

"Mark," she said, "it hasn't changed! It doesn't look as if a thing had been sold since we were

here on our honeymoon."

"It certainly doesn't," Dr. Mark Williams agreed, moving down the narrow aisle behind her. "If someone hadn't told us Sam Kee was dead, I'd believe we'd stepped back twenty years in time, like they do in those scientific stories young David reads."

"We must buy something," his wife said. "For a twentieth anniversary present for me. Perhaps a bell?"



From the shadowy depths of the shop a young man emerged, American in dress and manner despite the Oriental contours of his face and eyes.

"Good evening," he said. "May I show you something?"

"We think we want a bell," Dr. Williams chuckled. "But we aren't quite sure. You're Sam Kee's son?"

"Sam Kee, junior. My honored father passed to the halls of his ancestors five years ago. I could just say that he died —" black eyes twinkled — "but customers like the more flowery mode of speech. They think it's quaint."

"I think it's just nice, and not quaint at all," Edith Williams declared. "We're sorry your father is dead. We'd hoped to see him again. Twenty years ago when we were a very broke young couple on a honeymoon he sold us a wonderful rose-crystal necklace for half price."

"I'm sure he still made a profit." The black eyes twinkled again. "But if you'd like a bell, here are small temple bells, camel bells, dinner bells. . . ."

But even as he spoke, Edith Williams' hand darted to something at the back of the shelf.

"A bell carved out of crystal!" she exclaimed. "And rose-crystal at that. What could be more perfect? A rose-crystal wedding present and a rose-crystal anniversary present!"

The young man half stretched out his hand.

"I don't think you want that," he said. "It's broken."

"Broken?" Edith Williams rubbed off the dust and held the lovely bell-shape of crystal, the size of a pear, to the light. "It looks perfect to me."

"I mean it is not complete." Something of the American had vanished from the young man. "It has no clapper. It will not ring."

"Why, that's right." Mark Williams took the bell. "The clapper's missing."

"We can have another clapper made," his wife declared. "That is, if the original can't be found?"

The young Chinese shook his head.

"The bell and the clapper were deliberately separated by my father twenty years ago." He hesitated, then added: "My father was afraid of this bell."

"Afraid of it?" Mark Williams raised his eyebrows.

The other hesitated again.

"It will probably sound like a story for tourists," he said. "But my father believed it. This bell was supposedly stolen from the temple of a sect of Buddhists somewhere in the mountains of China's interior. Just as many Occidentals believe that the Christian Judgement Day will be heralded by a blast on St. Peter's trumpet, so this small sect is said

to believe that when a bell like this one is rung, a bell carved from a single piece of rose crystal, and consecrated by ceremonies lasting ten years, any dead within sound of it will rise and live again."

"Heavenly!" Edith Williams cried. "And no pun intended. Mark, think what a help this bell will be in your practise when we make it ring again!" To the Chinese she added, smiling: "I'm just teasing him. My husband is really a very fine surgeon."

The other bowed his head.

"I must tell you," he said, "you will not be able to make it ring. Only the original clapper, carved from the same block of rose crystal, will ring it. That is why my father separated them."

Again he hesitated.

"I have told you only half of what my father told me. He said that, though it defeats death, Death can not be defeated. Robbed of his chosen victim, he takes another in his place. Thus when the bell was used in the temple of its origin — let us say when a high priest or a chief had died — a slave or servant was placed handy for Death to take when he had been forced to relinquish his grasp upon the important one."

He smiled, shook his head.

"There," he said. "A preposterous story. Now if you wish it, the bell is ten dollars. Plus, of course, sales tax."

"The story alone is worth more," Dr. Williams declared. "I think we'd better have it sent, hadn't we, Edith? It'll be safer in the mail than in our suitcase."

"Sent?" His wife seemed to come out of some deep feminine meditation. "Oh, of course. And as for its not ringing — I shall make it ring. I know I shall."

"If the story is true," Mark Williams murmured, "I hope not. . . ."

The package came on a Saturday morning, when Mark Williams was catching up on the latest medical publications in his untidy, book-lined study. He heard Edith unwrapping paper in the hall outside. Then she came in with the rose-crystal bell in her hands.

"Mark, it's here!" she said. "Now to make it ring."

She plumped herself down beside his desk. He took the bell and reached for a silver pencil.

"Just for the sake of curiosity," he remarked, "and not because I believe that delightful sales talk we were given, let's see if it will ring when I tap. It should, you know."

He tapped the lip of the bell. A muted *thunk* was the only response. Then he tried with a coin, a paper knife, and the bottom of a glass. In each instance the resulting sound was nothing like a bell ringing.

"If you've finished, Mark," Edith said then, with feminine tolerance, "let me show you how it's done."

"Gladly," her husband agreed. She took the bell and turned away for a moment. Then she shook the bell vigorously. A clear, sweet ringing shivered through the room — so thin and ethereal that small involuntary shivers crawled up his spine.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "How did you do that?"

"I just put the clapper back in place with some thread," Edith told him.

"The clapper?" He struck his forehead with his palm. "Don't tell me — the crystal necklace we bought twenty years ago!"

"Of course." Her tone was composed. "As soon as young Sam Kee told us about his father's separating the clapper and the bell, I remembered the central crystal pendant on my necklace. It is shaped like a bell clapper — we mentioned it once.

"I guessed right away we had the missing clapper. But I didn't say so. I wanted to score on you, Mark —" she smiled affectionately at him — "and because, you know, I had a queer feeling Sam Kee, junior, wouldn't let us have the bell if he guessed we had the clapper."

"I don't think he would." Mark Williams picked up his pipe and rubbed the bowl with his

thumb. "Yet he didn't really believe that story he told us any more than we do."

"No, but his father did. And if old Sam Kee had told it to us — remember how wrinkled and wise he seemed? — I do believe we'd have believed the story."

"You're probably right." Dr. Williams rang the bell and waited. The thin, sweet sound seemed to hang in the air a long moment, then was gone.

"Nope," he said. "Nothing happened. Although, of course, that may be because there was no deceased around to respond."

"I'm not sure I feel like joking about the story." A small frown gathered on Edith's forehead. "I had planned to use the bell as a dinner bell and to tell the story to our guests. But now — I'm not sure."

Frowning, she stared at the bell until the ringing of the telephone in the hall brought her out of her abstraction.

"Sit still, I'll answer." She hurried out. Dr. Williams, turning the rose crystal bell over in his hand, could hear the sudden tension in her voice as she answered. He was on his feet when she reentered.

"An emergency operation at the hospital," she sighed. "Nice young man — automobile accident. Fracture of the skull, Dr. Amos says. He wouldn't have disturbed you but you're the only brain man in town, with Dr.

Hendryx away on vacation."

"I know." He was already in the hall, reaching for his hat. "Man's work is from sun to sun, but a doctor's work is never done," he misquoted.

"I'll drive you," Edith followed him out. "You sit back and relax for another ten minutes. . . ."

Two hours later, as they drove homeward, the traffic was light, which was fortunate. More than once Mark, in a frowning abstraction, found himself on the left of the center line and had to pull back into his own lane.

He had lost patients before, but never without a feeling of personal defeat. Edith said he put too much of himself into every operation. Perhaps he did. And yet — No, there was every reason why the young man should have lived. Yet, just as Mark Williams had felt that he had been successful, the patient had died.

In twenty years of marriage, Edith Williams had learned to read his thoughts at times. Now she put a hand comfortingly on his arm.

"These things happen, darling," she said. "You know that. A doctor can only do so much. Some of the job always remains in the hands of Nature. And she does play tricks at times."

"Yes, confound it, I know it," her husband growled. "But I resent losing that lad. There was

no valid reason for it — unless there was some complication I overlooked." He shook his head, scowling. "I ordered an autopsy but — Yes, I'm going to do that autopsy myself. I'm going to turn back and do it now. I have to know!"

He pulled abruptly to the left to swing into a side road and turn. Edith Williams never saw the car that hit them. She heard the frantic blare of a horn and a scream of brakes, and in a frozen instant realized that there had been someone behind them, about to pass. Then the impact came, throwing her forward into the windshield and unconsciousness.

Edith Williams opened her eyes. Even before she realized that she was lying on the ground and that the figure bending over her was a State Trooper, she remembered the crash. Her head hurt but there was no confusion in her mind. Automatically, even as she tried to sit up, she accepted the fact that there had been a crash, help had come, and she must have been unconscious for several minutes at least.

"Hey, lady, take it easy!" the Trooper protested. "You had a bad bump. You got to lie still until the ambulance gets here. It'll be along in five minutes."

"Mark," Edith said, paying no attention. "My husband! Is he all right?"

"Now lady, please. He's being taken care of. You —"

But she was not listening. Holding to his arm she pulled herself to a sitting position. She saw their car on its side some yards away, other cars pulled up around them, a little knot of staring people. Saw them and dismissed them. Her gaze found her husband, lying on the ground a few feet away, a coat folded beneath his head.

Mark was dead. She had been a doctor's wife for twenty years, and before that a nurse. She knew death when she saw it.

"Mark." The word was spoken to herself, but the Trooper took it for a question.

"Yes, lady," he said. "He's dead. He was still breathing when I got here, but he died two, three minutes ago."

She got to her knees. Her only thought was to reach his side. She scrambled across the few feet of ground to him still on her knees and crouched beside him, fumbling for his pulse. There was none. There was nothing. Just a man who had been alive and now was dead.

Behind her she heard a voice raised. She turned. A large, disheveled man was standing beside the Trooper, talking loudly.

"Now listen, officer," he was saying, "I'm telling you again, it wasn't my fault. The guy pulled sharp left right in front of me. Not a thing I could do. It's a wonder

we weren't all three of us killed. You can see by the marks on their car it wasn't my fault —"

Edith Williams closed her mind to the voice. She let Mark's hand lie in her lap as she fumbled in her bag, which was somehow still clutched in her fingers. She groped for a handkerchief to stem the tears which would not be held back. Something was in the way — something smooth and hard and cold. She drew it out and heard the thin, sweet tinkle of the crystal bell. She must have dropped it automatically into her bag as they were preparing to leave the house.

The hand in her lap moved. She gasped and bent forward as her husband's eyes opened.

"Mark!" she whispered. "Mark, darling!"

"Edith," Mark Williams said with an effort. "Sorry — damned careless of me. Thinking of the hospital . . ."

"You're alive!" she said. "You're alive! Oh, darling, darling, lie still, the ambulance will be here any second."

"Ambulance?" he protested. "I'm all right now. Help me — sit up."

"But Mark —"

"Just a bump on the head." He struggled to sit up. The State Trooper came over.

"Easy, buddy, easy," he said, his voice awed. "We thought you were gone. Now let's not lose you a

second time." His mouth was tight.

"Hey, I'm sure glad you're all right!" the red-faced man said in a rush of words. "Whew, fellow, you had me all upset, even though it wasn't my fault. I mean, how's a guy gonna keep from hitting you when — when —"

"Catch him!" Mark Williams cried, but the Trooper was too late. The other man plunged forward to the ground and lay where he had fallen without quivering.

The clock in the hall struck two with muted strokes. Cautiously Edith Williams rose on her elbow and looked down at her husband's face. His eyes opened and looked back at her.

"You're awake," she said, unnecessarily.

"I woke up a few minutes ago," he answered. "I've been lying here — thinking."

"I'll get you another phenobarbital. Dr. Amos said for you to take them and sleep until tomorrow."

"I know. I'll take one presently. You know — hearing that clock just now reminded me of something."

"Yes?"

"Just before I came to this afternoon, after the crash, I had a strange impression of hearing a bell ring. It sounded so loud in my ears I opened my eyes to see where it was."

"A — bell?"

"Yes. Just auditory hallucination, of course."

"But Mark —"

"Yes?"

"A — a bell did ring. I mean, I had the crystal bell in my bag and it tinkled a little. Do you suppose —"

"Of course not." But though he spoke swiftly he did not sound convincing. "This was a loud bell. Like a great gong."

"But — I mean, Mark darling — a moment earlier you — had no pulse."

"No pulse?"

"And you weren't — breathing. Then the crystal bell tinkled and you — you . . ."

"Nonsense! I know what you're thinking and believe me — it's nonsense!"

"But Mark." She spoke carefully. "The driver of the other car. You had no sooner regained consciousness than he —"

"He had a fractured skull!" Dr. Williams interrupted sharply. "The ambulance intern diagnosed it. Skull fractures often fail to show themselves and then — bingo, you keel over. That's what happened. Now let's say no more about it."

"Of course." In the hall, the clock struck the quarter hour. "Shall I fix the phenobarbital now?"

"Yes — no. Is David home?"

She hesitated. "No, he hasn't got back yet."

"Has he phoned? He knows he's supposed to be in by midnight at the latest."

"No, he — hasn't phoned. But there's a school dance tonight."

"That's no excuse for not phoning. He has the old car, hasn't he?"

"Yes. You gave him the keys this morning, remember?"

"All the more reason he should phone." Dr. Williams lay silent a moment. "Two o'clock is too late for a 17-year-old boy to be out."

"I'll speak to him. He won't do it again. Now please, Mark, let me get you the phenobarbital. I'll stay up until David —"

The ringing phone, a clamor in the darkness, interrupted her. Mark Williams reached for it. The extension was beside his bed.

"Hello," he said. And then, although she could not hear the answering voice, she felt him stiffen. And she knew. As well as if she could hear the words she knew, with a mother's instinct for disaster.

"Yes," Dr. Williams said. "Yes . . . I see . . . I understand . . . I'll come at once . . . Thank you for calling."

He slid out of bed before she could stop him.

"An emergency call." He spoke quietly. "I have to go." He began to throw on his clothes.

"It's David," she said. "Isn't it?" She sat up. "Don't try to

keep me from knowing. It's about David."

"Yes," he said. His voice was very tired. "David is hurt. I have to go to him. An accident."

"He's dead." She said it steadily. "David's dead, isn't he, Mark?"

He came over and sat beside her and put his arms around her.

"Edith," he said. "Edith — Yes, he's dead. Forty minutes ago. The car — went over a curve. They have him — at the County morgue. They want me to — identify him. Identify him. Edith! You see, the car caught fire!"

"I'm coming with you," she said. "I'm coming with you!"

The taxi waited in a pool of darkness between two street lights. The long, low building which was the County morgue, a blue lamp over its door, stood below the street level. A flight of concrete steps went down to it from the sidewalk. Ten minutes before, Dr. Mark Williams had gone down those steps. Now he climbed back up them, stiffly, wearily, like an old man.

Edith was waiting in the taxi, sitting forward on the edge of the seat, hands clenched. As he reached the last step she opened the door and stepped out.

"Mark," she asked shakily, "was it —"

"Yes, it's David." His voice was a monotone. "Our son. I've

completed the formalities. For now the only thing we can do is go home."

"I'm going to him!" She tried to pass. He caught her wrist. Discretely the taxi driver pretended to doze.

"No, Edith! There's no need. You mustn't — see him!"

"He's my son!" she cried. "Let me go!"

"No!" What have you got under your coat?"

"It's the bell, the rose-crystal bell!" she cried. "I'm going to ring it where David can hear!"

Defiantly she brought forth her hand, clutching the little bell. "It brought you back, Mark! Now it's going to bring back David!"

"Edith!" he said in horror. "You mustn't believe that's possible. You can't. Those were coincidences. Now let me have it!"

"No! I'm going to ring it." Violently she tried to break out of his grip. "I want David back! I'm going to ring the bell!"

She got her hand free. The crystal bell rang in the quiet of the early morning with an eerie thinness, penetrating the silence like a silver knife.

"There!" Edith Williams panted. "I've rung it. I know you don't believe, but I do. It'll bring David back." She raised her voice. "David!" she called. "David, son! Can you hear me?"

"Edith," Dr. Williams groaned. "You're just tormenting yourself.

Come home. Please come home."

"Not until David has come back . . . David, David, can you hear me?" She rang the bell again, rang it until Dr. Williams seized it, then she let him take it.

"Edith, Edith," he groaned. "If only you had let me come alone . . ."

"Mark, listen!"

"What?"

"Listen!" she whispered with fierce urgency.

He was silent. And then fingers of horror drew themselves down his spine at the clear, youthful voice that came up to them from the darkness below.

"Mother? . . . Dad? . . . Where are you?"

"David!" Edith Williams breathed. "It's David! Let me



"Lately I've been feeling only half there —"

go! I must go to him."

"No, Edith!" her husband whispered frantically, as the voice below called again.

"Dad? . . . Mother? . . . Are you up there? Wait for me."

"Let me go!" she sobbed. "David, we're here! We're up here, son!"

"Edith!" Mark Williams gasped. "If you've ever loved me, listen to me. You mustn't go down there. David — I had to identify him by his class ring and his wallet. He was burned — terribly burned!"

"I'm going to him!" She wrenched herself free and sped for the steps, up which now was coming a tall form, a shadow shrouded in the darkness.

Dr. Williams, horror knotting his stomach, leaped to stop her. But he slipped and fell headlong on the pavement, so that she was able to pant down the stairs to meet the upcoming figure.

"Oh, David," she sobbed, "David!"

"Hey, Mom!" The boy held her steady. "I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. But I didn't know what had happened until I got home and you weren't there and then one of the fellows from the fraternity called me. I realized they must have made a mistake, and you'd come here, and I called for a taxi and came out here. My taxi let me off at the entrance around the block, and I've been looking

for you down there . . . Poor Pete!"

"Pete?" she asked.

"Pete Friedburg. He was driving the old car. I lent him the keys and my driver's license. I shouldn't have — but he's older and he kept begging me. . . ."

"Then — then it's Pete who was killed?" she gasped. "Pete who was — burned?"

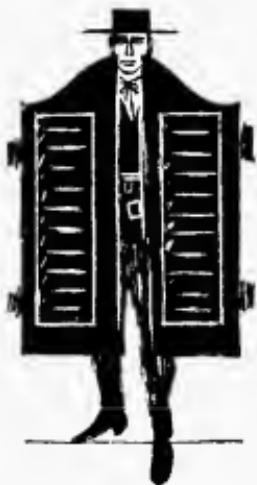
"Yes, Pete. I feel terrible about lending him the car. But he was supposed to be a good driver. And then them calling you, you and Dad thinking it was me —"

"Then Mark was right. Of course he was right." She was laughing and sobbing now. "It's just a bell, a pretty little bell, that's all."

"Bell? I don't follow you, Mom."

"Never mind," Edith Williams gasped. "It's just a bell. It hasn't any powers over life and death. It doesn't bring back and it doesn't take away. But let's get back up to your father. He may be thinking that the bell — that the bell really worked."

They climbed the rest of the steps. Dr. Mark Williams still lay where he had fallen headlong on the pavement. The cab driver was bending over him, but there was nothing to be done. The crystal bell had been beneath him when he fell, and it had broken. One long, fine splinter of crystal was embedded in his heart.



THE DRAW

BY JEROME BIXBY

Stories of the old West were filled with bad men who lived by the speed of their gun hand. Well, meet Buck Tarrant, who could outdraw them all. His secret: he didn't even have to reach for his weapon. . . .

JOE DOOLIN's my name. Cowhand — work for old Farrel over at Lazy F beyond the Pass. Never had much of anything exciting happen to me — just punched cows and lit up on payday — until the day I happened to ride through the Pass on my way to town and saw young Buck Tarrant's draw.

Now, Buck'd always been a damn good shot. Once he got his gun in his hand he could put a bullet right where he wanted it up to twenty paces, and within an inch of his aim up to a hundred feet. But Lord God, he couldn't draw to save his life — I'd seen him a couple of times before in the Pass, trying to. He'd face a tree and go into a crouch, and I'd know he was pretending the tree was Billy

the Kid or somebody, and then he'd slap leather — and his clumsy hand would wallop his gunbutt, he'd yank like hell, his old Peacemaker would come staggering out of his holster like a bear in heat, and finally he'd line on his target and plug it dead center. But the whole business took about a second and a half, and by the time he'd ever finished his fumbling in a real fight, Billy the Kid or Sheriff Ben Randolph over in town or even me, Joe Doolin, could have cut him in half.

So this time, when I was riding along through the Pass, I saw Buck upslope from me under the trees, and I just grinned and didn't pay too much attention.

He stood facing an old elm tree, and I could see he'd tacked a playing card about four feet

up the trunk, about where a man's heart would be.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw him go into his gunman's crouch. He was about sixty feet away from me, and, like I said, I wasn't paying much mind to him.

I heard the shot, flat down the rocky slope that separated us. I grinned again, picturing that fumbly draw of his, the wild slap at leather, the gun coming out drunklike, maybe even him dropping it — I'd seen him do that once or twice.

It got me to thinking about him, as I rode closer.

He was a bad one. Nobody said any different than that. Just bad. He was a bony runt of about eighteen, with bulging eyes and a wide mouth that was always turned down at the corners. He got his nickname Buck because he had buck teeth, not because he was heap man. He was some handy with his fists, and he liked to pick ruckuses with kids he was sure he could lick. But the tipoff on Buck is that he'd blat like a two-day calf to get out of mixing with somebody he was scared of — which meant somebody his own size or bigger. He'd jaw his way out of it, or just turn and slink away with his tail along his belly. His dad had died a couple years before, and he lived with his ma on a small

ranch out near the Pass. The place was falling to pieces, because Buck wouldn't lift a hand to do any work around — his ma just couldn't handle him at all. Fences were down, and the yard was all weedgrown, and the house needed some repairs — but all Buck ever did was hang around town, trying to rub up against some of the tough customers who drank in the Once Again Saloon, or else he'd ride up and lie around under the trees along the top of the Pass and just think — or, like he was today, he'd practise drawing and throwing down on trees and rocks.

Guess he always wanted to be tough. Really tough. He tried to walk with tough men, and, as we found out later, just about all he ever thought about while he was lying around was how he could be tougher than the next two guys. Maybe you've known characters like that — for some damfool reason they just got to be able to whup anybody who comes along, and they feel low and mean when they can't, as if the size of a man's fist was the size of the man.

So that's Buck Tarrant — a halfsized, poisonous, no-good kid who wanted to be a hardcase.

But he'd never be, not in a million years. That's what made it funny — and kind of pitiful too. There wasn't no real strength in him, only a scared hate. It



takes guts as well as speed to be tough with a gun, and Buck was just a nasty little rat of a kid who'd probably always counter-punch his way through life when he punched at all. He'd kite for cover if you lifted a lip.

I heard another shot, and looked up the slope. I was near enough now to see that the card he was shooting at was a ten of diamonds — and that he was plugging the pips one by one. Always could shoot, like I said.

Then he heard me coming, and whirled away from the tree, his gun holstered, his hand held out in front of him like he must have imagined Hickock or somebody held it when he was ready to draw.

I stopped my horse about ten feet away and just stared at him. He looked real funny in his baggy old levis and dirty checkered shirt and that big gun low on his hip, and me knowing he couldn't handle it worth a damn.

"Who you trying to scare, Buck?" I said. I looked him up and down and snickered. "You look about as dangerous as a sheepherder's wife."

"And you're a son of a bitch," he said.

I stiffened and shoved out my jaw. "Watch that, runt, or I'll get off and put my foot in your mouth and pull you on like a boot!"

"Will you now," he said nastily, "you son of a bitch?"

And he drew on me . . . and I goddam near fell backwards off my saddle!

I swear, I hadn't even seen his hand move, he'd drawn so fast! That gun just practically *appeared* in his hand!

"Will you now?" he said again, and the bore of his gun looked like a greased gate to hell.

I sat in my saddle scared spitless, wondering if this was when I was going to die. I moved my hands out away from my body, and tried to look friendlylike — actually, I'd never tangled with Buck, just razzed him a little now and then like everybody did: and I couldn't see much reason why he'd want to kill me.

But the expression on his face was full of gloating, full of wildness, full of damn-you recklessness — exactly the expression you'd look to find on a kid like Buck who suddenly found out he was the deadliest gunman alive.

And that's just what he was, believe me.

Once I saw Bat Masterson draw — and he was right up there with the very best. Could draw and shoot accurately in maybe half a second or so — you could hardly see his hand move; you just heard the slap of hand on gunbutt, and a split-second later the shot. It takes a lot of practise to be able to get a gun

out and on target in that space of time, and that's what makes gunmen. Practise, and a knack to begin with. And, I guess, the yen to be a gunman, like Buck Tarrant'd always had.

When I saw Masterson draw against Jeff Steward in Abilene, it was that way — slap, crash, and Steward was three-eyed. Just a blur of motion.

But when Buck Tarrant drew on me, right now in the Pass, I didn't see any motion *at all*. He just crouched, and then his gun was on me. Must have done it in a millionth of a second, if a second has millionths.

It was the fastest draw I'd ever seen. It was, I reckoned, the fastest draw anybody's ever seen. It was an impossibly fast draw — a man's hand just couldn't move to his holster that fast, and grab and drag a heavy Peacemaker up in a two foot arc that fast.

It was plain damn impossible — but there it was.

And there I was.

I didn't say a word. I just sat and thought about things, and my horse wandered a little farther up the slope and then stopped to chomp grass. All the time, Buck Tarrant was standing there, poised, that wild gloating look in his eyes, knowing he could kill me anytime and knowing I knew it.

When he spoke, his voice was

shaky — it sounded like he wanted to bust out laughing, and not a nice laugh either.

"Nothing to say, Doolin?" he said. "Pretty fast, huh?"

I said, "Yeah, Buck. Pretty fast." And my voice was shaky too, but not because I felt like laughing any.

He spat, eying me arrogantly. The ground rose to where he stood, and our heads were about on a level. But I felt he was looking down.

"Pretty fast!" he sneered. "Faster'n anybody!"

"I reckon it is, at that," I said. "Know how I do it?"

"No."

"I *think*, Doolin. I *think* my gun into my hand. How d'you like that?"

"It's awful fast, Buck."

"I just *think*, and my gun is there in my hand. Some draw, huh!"

"Sure is."

"You're damn right it is, Doolin. Faster'n anybody!"

I didn't know what his gabbling about "thinking his gun into his hand" meant — at least not then, I didn't — but I sure wasn't minded to question him on it. He looked wild-eyed enough right now to start taking bites out of the nearest tree.

He spat again and looked me up and down. "You know, you can go to hell, Joe Doolin. You're a lousy, God damn, white-livered

son of a bitch." He grinned coldly.

Not an insult, I knew now, but a deliberate taunt. I'd broken jaws for a lot less — I'm no runt, and I'm quick enough to hand back crap if some lands on me. But now I wasn't interested.

He saw I was mad, though, and stood waiting.

"You're fast enough, Buck," I said, "so I got no idea of trying you. You want to murder me, I guess I can't stop you — but I ain't drawing. No, sir, that's for sure."

"And a coward to boot," he jeered.

"Maybe," I said. "Put yourself in my place, and ask yourself why in hell I should kill myself?"

"Yellow!" he snarled, looking at me with his bulging eyes full of meanness and confidence.

My shoulders got tight, and it ran down along my gun arm. I never took that from a man before.

"I won't draw," I said. "Reckon I'll move on instead, if you'll let me."

And I picked up my reins, moving my hands real careful-like, and turned my horse around and started down the slope. I could feel his eyes on me, and I was half-waiting for a bullet in the back. But it didn't come. Instead Buck Tarrant called, "Doolin!"

I turned my head. "Yeah?"

He was standing there in the

same position. Somehow he reminded me of a crazy, runt wolf — his eyes were almost yellowish, and when he talked he moved his lips too much, mouthing his words, and his big crooked teeth flashed in the sun. I guess all the hankering for toughness in him was coming out — he was acting now like he'd always wanted to — cocky, unafeard, mean — because now he wore a bigger gun than anybody. It showed all over him, like poison coming out of his skin.

"Doolin," he called. "I'll be in town around three this afternoon. Tell Ben Randolph for me that he's a son of a bitch. Tell him he's a dunghead sheriff. Tell him he'd better look me up when I get there, or else get outta town and stay out. You got that?"

"I got it, Buck."

"Call me Mr. Tarrant, you Irish bastard."

"Okay . . . Mr. Tarrant," I said, and reached the bottom of the slope and turned my horse along the road through the Pass. About a hundred yards farther on, I hopped around in the saddle and looked back. He was practising again — the crouch, the fantastic draw, the shot.

I rode on toward town, to tell Ben Randolph he'd either have to run or die.

Ben was a lanky, slab-sided Texan who'd come up north on a

drive ten years before and liked the Arizona climate and stayed. He was a good sheriff — tough enough to handle most men, and smart enough to handle the rest. Fourteen years of it had kept him lean and fast.

When I told him about Buck, I could see he didn't know whether he was tough or smart or fast enough to get out of this one.

He leaned back in his chair and started to light his pipe, and then stared at the match until it burned his fingers without touching it to the tobacco.

"You sure, Joe?" he said.

"Ben, I saw it four times. At first I just couldn't believe my eyes — but I tell you, he's fast. He's faster'n you or me or Hickock or anybody. God knows where he got it, but he's got the speed."

"But," Ben Randolph said, lighting another match, "it just don't happen that way." His voice was almost mildly complaining. "Not overnight. Gun-speed's something you work on — it comes slow, mighty slow. You know that. How in hell could Buck Tarrant turn into a fire-eating gunslinger in a few days?" He paused and puffed. "You sure, Joe?" he asked again, through a cloud of smoke.

"Yes."

"And he wants me."

"That's what he said."

Ben Randolph sighed. "He's

a bad kid, Joe — just a bad kid. If his father hadn't died, I reckon he might have turned out better. But his mother ain't big enough to wallop his butt the way it needs."

"You took his gun away from him a couple times, didn't you, Ben?"

"Yeah. And ran him outa town too, when he got too pestiferous. Told him to get the hell home and help his ma."

"Guess that's why he wants you."

"That. And because I'm sheriff. I'm the biggest gun around here, and he don't want to start at the bottom, not him. He's gonna show the world right away."

"He can do it, Ben."

He sighed again. "I know. If what you say's true, he can sure show *me* anyhow. Still, I got to take him up on it. You know that. I can't leave town."

I looked at his hand lying on his leg — the fingers were trembling. He curled them into a fist, and the fist trembled.

"You ought to, Ben," I said.

"Of course I ought to," he said, a little savagely. "But I can't. Why, what'd happen to this town if I was to cut and run? Is there anyone else who could handle him? Hell, no."

"A crazy galoot like that," I said slowly, "if he gets too damn nasty, is bound to get kilt." I hesitated. "Even in the

back, if he's too good to take from the front."

"Sure," Ben Randolph said. "Sooner or later. But what about meantime? . . . how many people will he have to kill before somebody gets angry or nervy enough to kill *him*? That's my job, Joe — to take care of this kind of thing. Those people he'd kill are depending on me to get between him and them. Don't you see?"

I got up. "Sure, Ben, I see. I just wish *you* didn't."

He let out another mouthful of smoke. "You got any idea what he meant about thinking his gun into his hand?"

"Not the slightest. Some crazy explanation he made up to account for his sudden speed, I reckon."

Another puff. "You figure I'm a dead man, Joe, huh?"

"It looks kind of that way."

"Yeah, it kind of does, don't it?"

At four that afternoon Buck Tarrant came riding into town like he owned it. He sat his battered old saddle like a rajah on an elephant, and he held his right hand low beside his hip in an exaggerated gunman's stance. With his floppy hat over at a cocky angle, and his big eyes and scrawny frame, he'd have looked funny as hell trying to look like a tough hombre — ex-

cept that he *was* tough now, and everybody in town knew it because I'd warned them. Otherwise somebody might have jibed him, and the way things were now, that could lead to a sudden grave.

Nobody said a word all along the street as he rode to the hitchrail in front of the Once Again and dismounted. There wasn't many people around to say anything — most everybody was inside, and all you could see of them was a shadow of movement behind a window there, the flutter of a curtain there.

Only a few men sat in chairs along the boardwalks under the porches, or leaned against the porchposts, and they just sort of stared around, looking at Buck for a second and then looking off again if he turned toward them.

I was standing near to where Buck hitched up. He swaggered up the steps of the saloon, his right hand poised, his bulging eyes full of hell.

"You tell him?" he asked.

I nodded. "He'll look you up, like you said."

Buck laughed shortly. "I'll be waiting. I don't like that lanky bastard. I reckon I got some scores to settle with him." He looked at me, and his face twisted into what he thought was a tough snarl. Funny — you could see he really wasn't tough down in-

side. There wasn't any hard core of confidence and strength. His toughness was in his holster, and all the rest of him was acting to match up to it.

"You know," he said, "I don't like you either, Irish. Maybe I oughta kill you. Hell, why not?"

Now, the only reason I'd stayed out of doors that afternoon was I figured Buck had already had one chance to kill me and hadn't done it, so I must be safe. That's what I figured — he had nothing against me, so I was safe. And I had an idea that maybe, when the showdown came, I might be able to help out Ben Randolph somehow — if anything on God's Earth *could* help him.

Now, though, I wished to hell I hadn't stayed outside. I wished I was behind one of them windows, looking out at somebody else get told by Buck Tarrant that maybe he oughta kill him.

"But I won't," Buck said, grinning nastily. "Because you done me a favor. You run off and told the sheriff just like I told you — just like the goddam white-livered Irish sheepherder you are. Ain't that so?"

I nodded, my jaw set so hard with anger that the flesh felt stretched.

He waited for me to move against him. When I didn't, he laughed and swaggered to the door of the saloon. "Come on, Irish," he said over his shoulder. "I'll

buy you a drink of the best."

I followed him in, and he went over to the bar, walking heavy, and looked old Menner right in the eye and said, "Give me a bottle of the best stuff you got in the house."

Menner looked at the kid he'd kicked out of his place a dozen times, and his face was white. He reached behind him and got a bottle and put it on the bar.

"Two glasses," said Buck Tarrant.

Menner carefully put two glasses on the bar.

"*Clean* glasses."

Menner polished two other glasses on his apron and set them down.

"You don't want no money for this likker, do you, Menner?" Buck asked.

"No, sir."

"You'd just take it home and spend it on that fat heifer of a wife you got, and on them two little halfwit brats, wouldn't you?"

Menner nodded.

"Hell, they really ain't worth the trouble, are they?"

"No, sir."

Buck snickered and poured two shots and handed me one. He looked around the saloon and saw that it was almost empty — just Menner behind the bar, and a drunk asleep with his head on his arms at a table near the back,

and a little gent in fancy town clothes fingering his drink at a table near the front window and not even looking at us.

"Where is everybody?" he asked Menner.

"Why, sir, I reckon they're home, most of them," Menner said. "It being a hot day and all —"

"Bet it'll get hotter," Buck said, hard.

"Yes, sir."

"I guess they didn't want to really feel the heat, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's going to get so hot, you old bastard, that everybody'll feel it. You know that?"

"If you say so, sir."

"It might even get hot for you. Right now even. What do you think of that, huh?"

"I — I —"

"You thrun me outa here a couple times, remember?"

"Y-yes . . . but I —"

"Look at this!" Buck said — and his gun was in his hand, and he didn't seem to have moved at all, not an inch. I was looking right at him when he did it — his hand was on the bar, resting beside his shotglass, and then suddenly his gun was in it and pointing right at old Menner's belly.

"You know," Buck said, grinning at how Menner's fear was crawling all over his face, "I can put a bullet right where I

want to. Wanta see me do it?"

His gun crashed, and flame leaped across the bar, and the mirror behind the bar had a spiderweb of cracks radiating from a round black hole.

Menner stood there, blood leaking down his neck from a split earlobe.

Buck's gun went off again, and the other earlobe was a red tatter.

And Buck's gun was back in its holster with the same speed it had come out — I just couldn't see his hand move.

"That's enough for now," he told Menner. "This is right good likker, and I guess I got to have somebody around to push it across the bar for me, and you're as good as anybody to do jackass jobs like that."

He didn't ever look at Menner again. The old man leaned back against the shelf behind the bar, trembling, two trickles of red running down his neck and staining his shirt collar — I could see he wanted to touch the places where he'd been shot, to see how bad they were or just to rub at the pain, but he was afraid to raise a hand. He just stood there, looking sick.

Buck was staring at the little man in town clothes, over by the window. The little man had reared back at the shots, and now he was sitting up in his chair, his eyes straight on Buck. The table in

front of him was wet where he'd spilled his drink when he'd jumped.

Buck looked at the little guy's fancy clothes and small mustache and grinned. "Come on," he said to me, and picked up his drink and started across the floor. "Find out who the dude is."

He pulled out a chair and sat down — and I saw he was careful to sit facing the front door, and also where he could see out the window.

I pulled out another chair and sat.

"Good shooting, huh?" Buck asked the little guy.

"Yes," said the little guy. "Very fine shooting. I confess, it quite startled me."

Buck laughed harshly. "Startled the old guy too . . ." He raised his voice. "Ain't that right, Menner? Wasn't you startled?"

"Yes, sir," came Menner's pain-filled voice from the bar.

Buck looked back at the little man — let his insolent gaze travel up and down the fancy waistcoat, the string tie, the sharp face with its mustache and narrow mouth and black eyes. He looked longest at the eyes, because they didn't seem to be scared.

He looked at the little guy, and the little guy looked at Buck, and finally Buck looked away. He tried to look wary as he did it, as if he was just fixing to make sure that nobody was around to sneak-

shoot him — but you could see he'd been stared down.

When he looked back at the little guy, he was scowling. "Who're you, mister?" he said. "I never seen you before."

"My name is Jacob Pratt, sir. I'm just traveling through to San Francisco. I'm waiting for the evening stage."

"Drummer?"

"Excuse me?"

For a second Buck's face got ugly. "You heard me, mister. You a drummer?"

"I heard you, young man, but I don't quite understand. Do you mean, am I a musician? A performer upon the drums?"

"No, you goddam fool — I mean, what're you selling? Snakebite medicine? Likker? Soap?"

"Why — I'm not selling anything. I'm a professor, sir."

"Well, I'll be damned." Buck looked at him a little more carefully. "A perfessor, huh? Of what?"

"Of psychology, sir."

"What's that?"

"It's the study of man's behavior — of the reasons why we act as we do."

Buck laughed again, and it was more of a snarl. "Well, perfessor, you just stick around here then, and I'll show you some *real* reasons for people acting as they do! From now on, I'm the big reason in this town . . . they'll jump when I yell frog, or else!"

His hand was flat on the table in front of him — and suddenly his Peacemaker was in it, pointing at the professor's fourth vest button. "See what I mean huh?"

The little man blinked. "Indeed I do," he said, and stared at the gun as if hypnotized. Funny, though — he still didn't seem scared — just a lot interested.

Sitting there and just listening, I thought about something else funny — how they were both just about of a size, Buck and the professor, and so strong in different ways: with the professor, you felt he was strong inside — a man who knew a lot, about things and about himself — while with Buck it was all on the outside, on the surface: he was just a milksop kid with a deadly sting.

Buck was still looking at the professor, as carefully as he had before. He seemed to hesitate for a second, his mouth twisting. Then he said, "You're an educated man, ain't you? I mean, you studied a lot. Ain't that right?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Well . . ." Again Buck seemed to hesitate. The gun in his hand lowered until the end of the barrel rested on the table. "Look," he said slowly, "maybe you can tell me how in hell . . ."

When he didn't go on, the professor said, "Yes?"

"Nothing."

"You were going to say — ?"

Buck looked at him, his bulging eyes narrowed, the gunman's smirk on his lips again. "Are you telling me what's true and what ain't," he said softly, "with my gun on you?"

"Does the gun change anything?"

Buck tapped the heavy barrel on the table. "I say it changes a hell of a lot of things." *Tap* went the barrel. "You wanna argue?"

"Not with the gun," the professor said calmly. "It always wins. I'll talk with you, however, if you'll talk with your mouth instead of with the gun."

By this time I was filled with admiration for the professor's guts, and fear that he'd get a bullet in them . . . I was all set to duck, in case Buck should lose his temper and start throwing lead.

But suddenly Buck's gun was back in his holster. I saw the professor blink again in astonishment.

"You know," Buck said, grinning loosely, "you got a lotta nerve, professor. Maybe you *can* tell me what I wanna know."

He didn't look at the little man while he talked — he was glancing around, being "wary" again. And grinning that grin at the same time. You could see he was off-balance — he was acting like everything was going on just like he wanted it; but actually the professor had beaten him again,

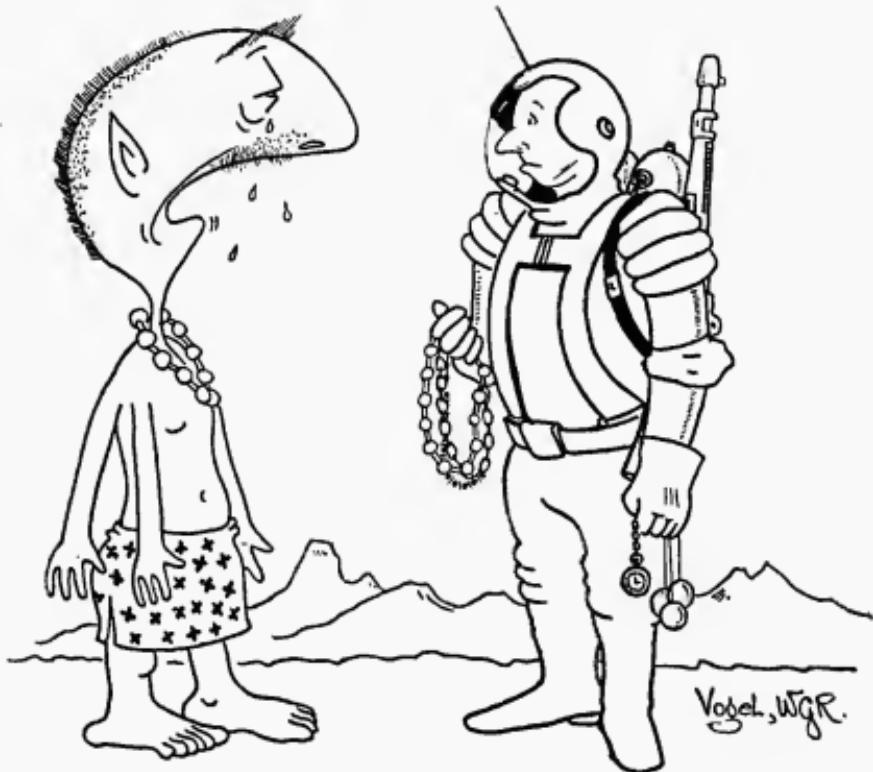
words against the gun, eyes against eyes.

The professor's dark eyes were level on Buck's right now. "What is it you want to know?"

"This—" Buck said, and his gun was in his hand again, and it was the first time when he did it that his face stayed sober and kind of stupid-looking, his normal expression, instead of getting wild and dangerous. "How — do you know how do I do it?"

"Well," the professor said, "suppose you give me your answer first, if you have one. It might be the right one."

"I—" Buck shook his head — "Well, it's like I *think* the gun into my hand. It happened the first time this morning. I was standing out in the Pass where I always practise drawing, and I was wishing I could draw faster'n anybody who ever lived — I was



"Trinkets, beads — beads, trinkets! How about a bottle of gin once in awhile?"

wishing I could just get my gun outa leather in no time atall. And—" the gun was back in his holster in the blink of an eye—"that's how it happened. My gun was in my hand. Just like that. I didn't even reach for it—I was just getting set to draw, and had my hand out in front of me . . . and my gun was in my hand before I knew what'd happened. God, I was so surprised I almost fell over!"

"I see," said the professor slowly. "You *think* it into your hand?"

"Yeah, kind of."

"Would you do it now, please?" And the professor leaned forward so he could see Buck's holster, eyes intent.

Buck's gun appeared in his hand.

The professor let out a long breath. "Now think it back into its holster."

It was there.

"You did not move your arm either time," said the professor.

"That's right," said Buck.

"The gun was just suddenly in your hand instead of in your holster. And then it was back in the holster."

"Right."

"Telekinesis," said the professor, almost reverently.

"Telewhat?"

"Telekinesis—the moving of material objects by mental force." The professor leaned back and

studied the holstered gun. "It *must* be that. I hardly dared think it at first—the first time you did it. But the thought did occur to me. And now I'm virtually certain!"

"How do you say it?"

"T-e-l-e-k-i-n-e-s-i-s."

"Well, how do I *do* it?"

"I can't answer that. Nobody knows. It's been the subject of many experiments, and there are many reported happenings—but I've never heard of any instance even remotely as impressive as this." The professor leaned across the table again. "Can you do it with other things, young man?"

"What other things?"

"That bottle on the bar, for example."

"Never tried."

"Try."

Buck stared at the bottle.

It wavered. Just a little. Rocked, and settled back.

Buck stared harder, eyes bulging.

The bottle shivered. That was all.

"Hell," Buck said. "I can't seem to—to get ahold of it with my mind, like I can with my gun."

"Try moving this glass on the table," the professor said. "It's smaller, and closer."

Buck stared at the glass. It moved a fraction of an inch across the tabletop. No more.

Buck snarled like a dog and

swatted the glass with his hand, knocking it halfway across the room.

"Possibly," the professor said, after a moment, "you can do it with your gun because you want to so very badly. The strength of your desire releases—or creates—whatever psychic forces are necessary to perform the act." He paused, looking thoughtful. "Young man, suppose you try to transport your gun to—say, to the top of the bar."

"Why?" Buck asked suspiciously.

"I want to see whether distance is a factor where the gun is concerned. Whether you can place the gun that far away from you, or whether the power operates only when you want your gun in your hand."

"No," Buck said in an ugly voice. "Damn if I will. I'd maybe get my gun over there and not be able to get it back, and then you'd jump me—the two of you. I ain't minded to experiment around too much, thank you."

"All right," the professor said, as if he didn't care. "The suggestion was purely in the scientific spirit—"

"Sure," said Buck. "Sure. Just don't get any more scientific, or I'll experiment on how many holes you can get in you before you die."

The professor sat back in his chair and looked Buck right in

the eye. After a second, Buck looked away, scowling.

Me, I hadn't said a word the whole while, and I wasn't talking now.

"Wonder where that goddam yellow-bellied sheriff is?" Buck said. He looked out the window, then glanced sharply at me. "He said he'd come, huh?"

"Yeah." When I was asked, I'd talk.

We sat in silence for a few moments.

The professor said, "Young man, you wouldn't care to come with me to San Francisco, would you? I and my colleagues would be very grateful for the opportunity to investigate this strange gift of yours—we would even be willing to pay you for your time and—"

Buck laughed. "Why, hell, I reckon I got bigger ideas'n that, mister! *Real* big ideas. There's no man alive I can't beat with a gun! I'm going to take Billy the Kid . . . Hickock . . . all of them! I'm going to get myself a rep bigger'n all theirs put together. Why, when I walk into a saloon, they'll hand me likker. I walk into a bank, they'll give me the place. No lawman from Canada to Mexico will even stay in the same town with me! Hell, what could *you* give me, you goddam little dude?"

The professor shrugged. "Nothing that would satisfy you."

"That's right." Suddenly Buck stiffened, looking out the window. He got up, his bulging blue eyes staring down at us. "Randolph's coming down the street! You two just stay put, and maybe — just maybe — I'll let you live. Professor, I wanna talk to you some more about this telekinesis stuff. Maybe I can get even faster than I am, or control my bullets better at long range. So you be here, get that?"

He turned and walked out the door.

The professor said, "He's not sane."

"Nutty as a locoed steer," I said. "Been that way for a long time. An ugly shrimp who hates

everything — and now he's in the saddle holding the reins, and some people are due to get rode down." I looked curiously at him. "Look, professor — this telekinesis stuff — is all that on the level?"

"Absolutely."

"He just *thinks* his gun into his hand?"

"Exactly."

"Faster than anyone could ever draw it?"

"Inconceivably faster. The time element is almost non-existent."

I got up, feeling worse than I'd ever felt in my life. "Come on," I said. "Let's see what happens."

As if there was any doubt about what was bound to happen.

We stepped out onto the porch and over to the rail. Behind us, I



heard Menner come out too. I looked over my shoulder. He'd wrapped a towel around his head. Blood was leaking through it. He was looking at Buck, hating him clear through.

The street was deserted except for Buck standing about twenty feet away, and, at the far end, Sheriff Ben Randolph coming slowly toward him, putting one foot ahead of the other in the dust.

A few men were standing on porches, pressed back against the walls, mostly near doors. Nobody was sitting now—they were ready to groundhog if lead started flying wild.

"God damn it," I said in a low, savage voice. "Ben's too good a man to get kilt this way. By a punk kid with some crazy psychowhosis way of handling a gun."

I felt the professor's level eyes on me, and turned to look at him.

"Why," he said, "doesn't a group of you get together and face him down? Ten guns against his one. He'd have to surrender."

"No, he wouldn't," I said. "That ain't the way it works. He'd just dare any of us to be the first to try and stop him—and none of us would take him up on it. A group like that don't mean anything—it'd be each man against Buck Tarrant, and none of us good enough."

"I see," the professor said softly.

"God . . ." I clenched my fists so hard they hurt. "I wish we could think his gun right back into the holster or something!"

Ben and Buck were about forty feet apart now. Ben was coming on steadily, his hand over his gunbutt. He was a good man with a gun, Ben—nobody around these parts had dared tackle him for a long time. But he was outclassed now, and he knew it. I guess he was just hoping that Buck's first shot or two wouldn't kill him, and that he could place a good one himself before Buck let loose any more.

But Buck was a damn good shot. He just wouldn't miss.

The professor was staring at Buck with a strange look in his eyes.

"He should be stopped," he said.

"Stop him, then," I said sourly.

"After all," he mused, "if the ability to perform telekinesis lies dormant in all of us, and is released by strong faith and desire to accomplish something that can be accomplished only by that means—then our desire to stop him might be able to counter his desire to —"

"Damn you and your big words," I said bitterly.

"It was your idea," the professor said, still looking at Buck. "What you said about thinking

his gun back into its holster — after all, we *are* two to his one —"

I turned around and stared at him, really hearing him for the first time. "Yeah, that's right — I said that! My God . . . do you think we could do it?"

"We can try," he said. "We know it *can* be done, and evidently that is nine-tenths of the battle. He can do it, so we should be able to. We must want him *not* to more than he *wants* to."

"Lord," I said, "I want him not to, all right . . ."

Ben and Buck were about twenty feet apart now, and Ben stopped.

His voice was tired when he said, "Any time, Buck."

"You're a hell of a sheriff," Buck sneered. "You're a no-good

bastard."

"Cuss me out," Ben said. "Don't hurt me none. I'll be ready when you start talking with guns."

"I'm ready now, beanpole," Buck grinned. "You draw first, huh?"

"*Think of his gun!*" the professor said in a fierce whisper. "Try to grab it with your mind — break his aim — pull it away from him — *you know it can be done!* Think, think —"

Ben Randolph had never in anyone's knowledge drawn first against a man. But now he did, and I guess nobody could blame him.

He slapped leather, his face already dead — and Buck's Peacemaker was in his hand —

And me and the professor were standing like statues on the porch of the Once Again, thinking at that gun, glaring at it, fists clenched, our breath rasping in our throats.

The gun appeared in Buck's hand, and wobbled just as he slipped hammer. The bullet sprayed dust at Ben's feet.

Ben's gun was halfway out.

Buck's gunbarrel pointed down at the ground, and he was trying to lift it so hard his hand got white. He drove a bullet into the dust at his own feet, and stared to whine.

Ben's gun was up and aiming. Buck shot himself in the foot.



"And now, Mr. Mafoogle, would you mind telling the court where you were — er, hatched?"

Then Ben shot him once in the right elbow, once in the right shoulder. Buck screamed and dropped his gun and threw out his arms, and Ben, who was a thorough man, put a bullet through his right hand, and another one on top of it.

Buck sat in the dust and flapped blood all around, and bawled when we came to get him.

The professor and I told Ben Randolph what had happened, and nobody else. I think he believed us.

Buck spent two weeks in the town jail, and then a year in the state pen for pulling on Randolph, and nobody's seen him now for six years. Don't know what happened to him, or care much. I reckon he's working as a cowhand someplace — anyway, he sends his mother money now and then, so he must have tamed down some and growed up some too.

While he was in the town jail, the professor talked to him a lot — the professor delayed his trip just to do it.

One night he told me, "Tarrant can't do anything like that again. Not at all, even with his left hand. The gunfight destroyed his faith in his ability to do it — or most of it, anyway. And I finished the job, I guess, asking all my ques-

tions. I guess you can't think too much about that sort of thing."

The professor went on to San Francisco, where he's doing some interesting experiments. Or trying to. Because he has the memory of what happened that day — but, like Buck Tarrant, not the ability to do anything like that any more. He wrote me a couple times, and it seems that ever since that time he's been absolutely unable to do any telekinesis. He's tried a thousand times and can't even move a feather.

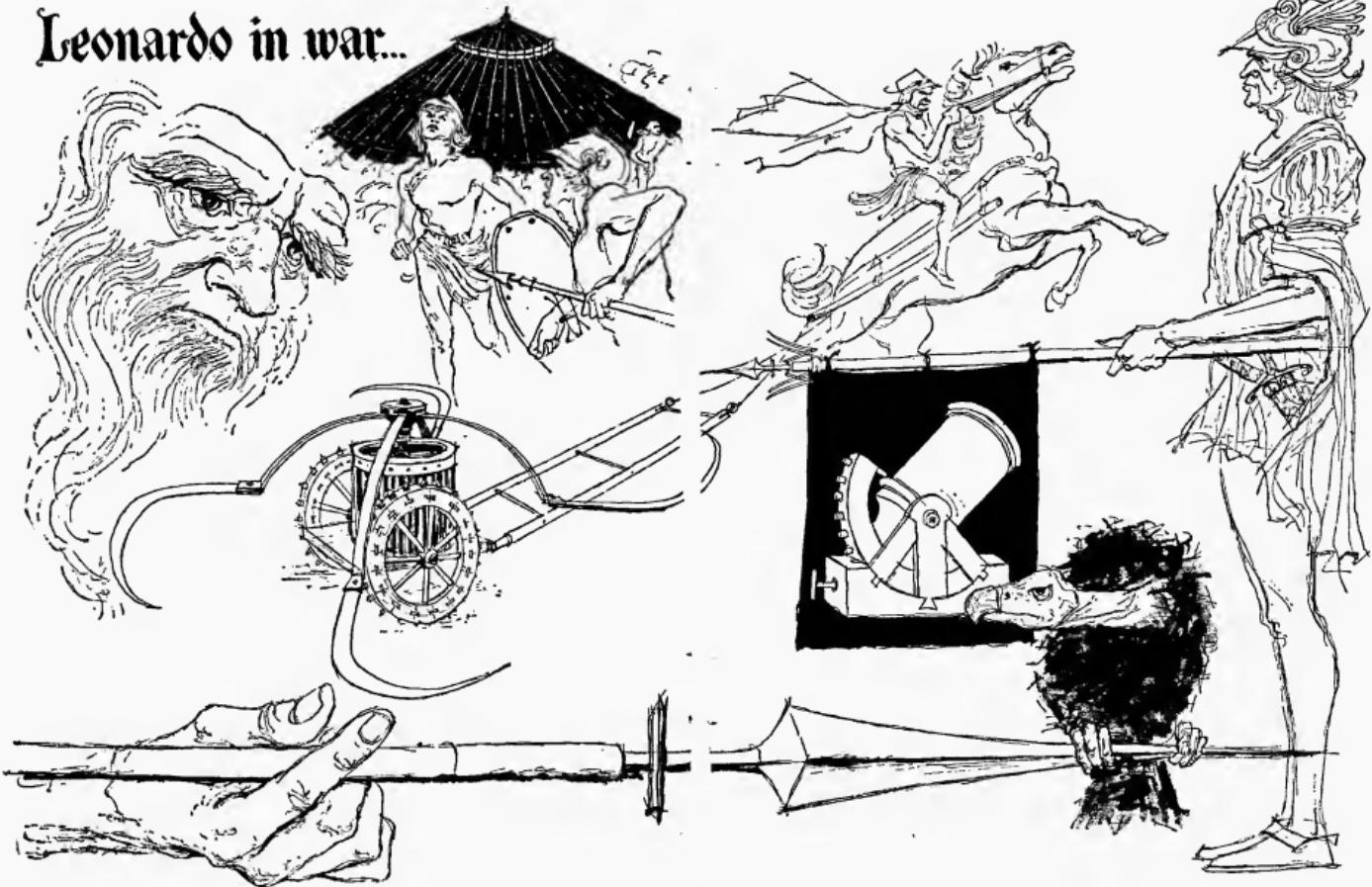
So he figures it was really me alone who saved Ben's life and stopped Buck in his tracks.

I wonder. Maybe the professor just knows too much not to be some skeptical, even with what he saw. Maybe the way he looks at things and tries to find reasons for them gets in the way of his faith.

Anyway, he wants me to come to San Francisco and get experimented on. Maybe someday I will. Might be fun, if I can find time off from my job.

I got a lot of faith, you see. What I see, I believe. And when Ben retired last year, I took over his job as sheriff — because I'm the fastest man with a gun in these parts. Or, actually, in the world. Probably if I wasn't the peaceable type, I'd be famous or something.

Leonardo in war...





...and in peace



OPERATION LORELIE

BY WILLIAM P. SALTON

It was a new time and a vast new war of complete and awful annihilation. Yet, some things never change, and, as in ancient times, Ulysses walked again—brave and unconquerable — and again, the sirens wove their deadly spell with a smile and a song.

THEY came like monsters, rather than men, into the vast ruin of what had once been a great city. They walked carefully, side by side, speaking to each other by radio as though they were in deep space rather than upon solid ground.

The winding way they followed through the ruins was marked by

blurred footsteps in the dust and the two men, clumsy in their bulky suits, found the going difficult.

They stopped, and one of them held out an instrument. He studied the dial. "All clear," and both men removed their helmets. They wiped sweat from their faces and glanced at each other.



The blonde man said, "The air's okay, Jarvis. Everything seems all right. I don't get it."

Jarvis, his dark eyes wary, scowled as he looked about. "It seems all right. But we know it isn't. It can't be."

"I'm shucking this suit."

"Don't be a fool, Mark!"

"But the dial read *clear*, man! And we know nobody is going to shoot us. All life *had* to be wiped out."

"How about minor power installations?"

Jarvis took a chocolate bar from his pocket, sat down on a piece of broken rubble and began to eat. "You're too careless — far too careless, Mark."

Mark laughed. "You've always been cautious enough for both of us. Got me out of plenty of scrapes back in school, too. Don't think I've forgotten." Affection warmed his blue eyes as they rested on the face of his friend.

"Okay! Okay! But what happened to them? Where did they go?" Jarvis took nervous bites from his second chocolate bar. Then he, too, peeled off his suit. He sniffed the air distrustfully, as he wiggled his shoulders to free them from the clinging, damp shirt. Then he took a few experimental steps forward.

"Seems all right, Mark. But how do you explain about Hank and Garland? Never were two more careful guys."

"Probably a simple miscalculation. Or an accident. We know it couldn't have been enemy action. Tests prove conclusively that we wiped them out — to a man." He took deep gulps of air into his lungs, and stretched like a cat. "We'll find out soon enough. Boy, I feel great!"

They deflated and folded their safety suits and added the bundles to the other equipment on their backs. Then, with their instruments held before them, they probed their way into the twisted wreckage, still following the faint, dust-filled footprints.

Bent and rusted girders rose on all sides like the bones of prehistoric monsters. Nothing stirred. The dust lay ages-thick on everything.

"Gives you the spooks, doesn't it?" Jarvis was still tense, poised to respond to the first signal of danger. "Feels like we're the last men alive!"

"Funny about Hank and Garland. There's nothing here to harm anyone."

Jarvis looked at his watch. "Better contact HQ for instructions."

The two stepped off the path, into the shade of a grotesque chunk of broken masonry. Mark set up the radio and twirled the dials. "Team Four, calling HQ. Team Four, reporting!"

"HQ here." The voice from the

radio blared loud in the stillness.
"Give your report, Team Four."

"Looks like nothing's moved here in a thousand years. Safe as a baby's dream. Rock-solid, air morning-pure. But—" He hesitated, trying not to sound like a scared school boy. "No sign of Team Three. Or of Teams One and Two, either. Over."

"Look here, Team Four. It's your job to find out. The earth didn't just swallow them. Final report from each team placed them well within the city. It's been ten days since the last contact. Probe every inch of the place."

"Right!"

"But be careful. We can't afford to lose any more men! Roger!"

"Roger!"

There was only one way now — ahead. It lay clearly marked. The dim footsteps never strayed or faltered. Three hours of search revealed no pitfalls, no dangers, and no trace of the missing men. Then night was upon them and they bedded down gratefully.

"Strange, isn't it? The war over. The invaders blasted from the earth. All peril gone. And yet — men disappear."

Jarvis stared at the ruins around them. "I can't take much more, Mark. Twelve years of war is enough. Are we never to have a life — have our home and women back, and — *peace?*"

"Sure it's been tough. But think of the women and children isolated on that sub-satellite. It's tougher for them — just waiting." Stretched on his back, Mark stared at the cloudless, evening sky. "But pretty soon we'll get this planet cleaned up and bring them in. Christ! Four years without even seeing a woman. I remember the last time —"

"Okay!" Jarvis interrupted impatiently. "Let's get to sleep."

"Sure, pal. Goodnight."

They fell asleep to dream of green hills, corn ripening, apples roasting over an open fire. Peace, and home, and girls, their firm legs flashing in the sun.

Soldierlike, Mark was suddenly awake. He lay without motion, sensitive to some subtle change in the surroundings. From the corner of his eye he could see Jarvis wrapped in sleep. The silence seemed eternal.

Then, whisper-soft, came a murmur, a sound, a voice. A girl's voice, sighing and singing, from deep in that devasted spot.

A woman!

Instantly, Mark was on his feet. No need to wake Jarvis. Plenty of time for Jarvis to find out — afterwards. But not yet! A miracle that a girl had survived in all that wreckage. But a miracle he wanted to savour alone!

Ahead, the path turned and Mark followed it as it went for-

ward again, downhill, between the massed walls of rubble. Now the voice swelled, a melancholy song. Well, she won't be melancholy for long, Mark thought. Her solitary ordeal was over.

"Mark!" Jarvis stood on an upturned lintel, ten feet above Mark's head. As Mark jerked to a stop at the cry, Jarvis jumped into his path. "You fool! Don't you know it's a trap?"

"So that's how you want to play it? The noble friend, protecting me from myself!" He slammed a fist into the side of Jarvis' head. "Well, I won't bite! She's mine! I found her!"

In silence, in the narrow passage between the rocks, the two fought. Suddenly, above the sound of fist on flesh, came the voice of the girl again, clear, young. "She is there," thought Jarvis. He could almost taste her lips on his. The sensation came as a shock. How did he know? He'd never had a woman. That's what came from listening to the tales of Mark's exploits with women. Now he had to have that girl!

The mounting tension of the fighting snapped something in Jarvis' seething mind. Danger, friendship, duty, all meant nothing. Only one thing mattered. The girl! Mark had had more than his share of girls. He Jarvis, was the one who should have her! He'd been deprived of his man-

hood long enough! His frenzied brain hunted a trick to gain his ends.

Mark's superior strength began to force Jarvis to give ground. Then a final blow sent him reeling, he reached out to break his fall, his hand closed on a rock. He threw it. Mark crashed to the ground, his knee smashed, his leg useless. Then the tomb stillness of the dead city took over. The dust settled slowly. Mark came to his feet.

Jarvis was gone.

Dragging his useless leg, Mark forced himself to crawl forward. Jarvis had to be stopped.

Ahead, a shadow moved, and for a moment the moon threw the silhouette of a man against a cavernous opening in the debris.

"Jarvis!"

An electric flash shattered the darkness. The jagged teeth of the bolt spit tongues of fire. Cordite mingled with the raw, nauseant, revolting smell of scorched flesh and hair. The figure tottered and fell into the black mouth of the cave. Then, as the flame faded, it lit up small bundles of charred bones near the fallen body.

There was a whir and a click of a mechanism. Fifteen feet away, Mark watched as the arm of a phonograph rose, moved slowly back to the starting point. Then the record began once more to grind out its death-trap melody.



KEEP OUT

BY FREDERIC BROWN

With no more room left on Earth, and with Mars hanging up there empty of life, somebody hit on the plan of starting a colony on the Red Planet. It meant changing the habits and physical structure of the immigrants, but that worked out fine. In fact, every possible factor was covered — except one of the flaws of human nature. . . .

DAPTINE is the secret of it. Adapting, they called it first; then it got shortened to daptine. It let us adapt.

They explained it all to us when we were ten years old; I guess they thought we were too young to understand before then, although

we knew a lot of it already. They told us just after we landed on Mars.

"You're *home*, children," the Head Teacher told us after we had gone into the glassite dome they'd built for us there. And he told us there'd be a special lecture for us

that evening, an important one that we must all attend.

And that evening he told us the whole story and the whys and wherefores. He stood up before us. He had to wear a heated space suit and helmet, of course, because the temperature in the dome was comfortable for us but already freezing cold for him and the air was already too thin for him to breathe. His voice came to us by radio from inside his helmet.

"Children," he said, "you are home. This is Mars, the planet on which you will spend the rest of your lives. You are Martians, the first Martians. You have lived five years on Earth and another five in space. Now you will spend ten years, until you are adults, in this dome, although toward the end of that time you will be allowed to spend increasingly long periods outdoors.

"Then you will go forth and make your own homes, live your own lives, as Martians. You will intermarry and your children will breed true. They too will be Martians.

"It is time you were told the history of this great experiment of which each of you is a part."

Then he told us.

Man, he said, had first reached Mars in 1985. It had been uninhabited by intelligent life (there is plenty of plant life and a few varieties of non-flying insects) and he had found it by terrestrial

standards uninhabitable. Man could survive on Mars only by living inside glassite domes and wearing space suits when he went outside of them. Except by day in the warmer seasons it was too cold for him. The air was too thin for him to breathe and long exposure to sunlight — less filtered of rays harmful to him than on Earth because of the lesser atmosphere — could kill him. The plants were chemically alien to him and he could not eat them; he had to bring all his food from Earth or grow it in hydroponic tanks.

For fifty years he had tried to colonize Mars and all his efforts had failed. Besides this dome which had been built for us there was only one other outpost, another glassite dome much smaller and less than a mile away.

It had looked as though mankind could never spread to the other planets of the solar system besides Earth for of all of them Mars was the least inhospitable; if he couldn't live here there was no use even trying to colonize the others.

And then, in 2034, thirty years ago, a brilliant biochemist named Waymoth had discovered daptine. A miracle drug that worked not on the animal or person to whom it was given but on the progeny he conceived during a limited period of time after inoculation.

It gave his progeny almost limitless adaptability to changing conditions, provided the changes were made gradually.

Dr. Waymuth had innoculated and then mated a pair of guinea pigs; they had borne a litter of five and by placing each member of the litter under different and gradually changing conditions, he had obtained amazing results. When they attained maturity one of those guinea pigs was living comfortably at a temperature of forty below zero Fahrenheit, another was quite happy at a hundred and fifty above. A third was thriving on a diet that would have been deadly poison for an ordinary animal and a fourth was contented under a constant X-ray bombardment that would have killed one of its parents within minutes.

Subsequent experiments with many litters showed that animals who had been adapted to similar conditions bred true and their progeny was conditioned from birth to live under those conditions.

"Ten years later, ten years ago," the Head Teacher told us, "you children were born. Born of parents carefully selected from those who volunteered for the experiment. And from birth you have been brought up under carefully controlled and gradually changing conditions.

"From the time you were born the air you have breathed has

been very gradually thinned and its oxygen content reduced. Your lungs have compensated by becoming much greater in capacity, which is why your chests are so much larger than those of your teachers and attendants; when you are fully mature and are breathing air like that of Mars, the difference will be even greater.

"Your bodies are growing fur to enable you to stand the increasing cold. You are comfortable now under conditions which would kill ordinary people quickly. Since you were four years old your nurses and teachers have had to wear special protection to survive conditions that seem normal to you.

(Continued on page 129)



"Jones, drop what you're doing and —"

SORRY: Wrong Dimension

BY ROSS ROCKLYNN

So the baby had a pet monster. And so nobody but baby could see it. And so a couple of men dropped out of thin air to check and see if the monster was licensed or not. So what's strange about that?

BABY DIDN'T cry all day, because he had a monster for a playmate. But I didn't know he had a playmate, and much less did I know it was a monster. The honest truth is that for the first time since baby was born, I had my nerves under control, and I didn't dare investigate why he wasn't crying. I got all the ironing done — all of it, mind you — and I got Harry's work-clothes mended and I also read three installments of a Saturday Evening Post serial I'd been saving. And besides this Mabel, my neighbor, and I had a couple or three cups of coffee. We also had a giggling fit. I remember once we went off into hysterics at the picture of ourselves we had — two haggard old wrecks of women, worn out at twenty-three from too much work around the house. "But thank Heavens baby hasn't cried all day!" I gurgled when we came out of it.

"Neither has mine," said Mabel, who isn't due for six months.

"Mabel, honest, you kill me," I said, "and excuse me while I comb my messy hair — because I'm *not* a wreck. Harry said so. He says I'm still the best hunk of female pulchritude he's met since high school — and we've been married two years!"

I went into the bathroom leaving Mabel choking hysterically behind me. When I came out of the bathroom, she was hysterical but in a different way. She'd discovered why Harry, Jr., wasn't crying. She'd been in the nursery. Her face was white as an egg-shell.

"He's playing with something," she chattered. "It's *alive*. I heard it cooing back."

I ran three steps to baby's crib . . . one on the corner of Little Jack Horner, one on the sheep of Little Bo Peep, one on the cupboard of Old Mother Hubbard. "Baby!" I almost screamed. But baby cooed and gurgled and laughed and rocked back and



forth on his diapers. He was playing with his teething ring, but something was trying to jerk the teething ring out of his hands. And baby liked it.

Baby lost his hold on the teething ring, and fell on his back. The teething ring stayed up in the air and then by itself moved toward baby's waving hands and let him get a hold of it.

Mabel screeched through her teeth, "Baby's got it, the monster's got it, now baby's got it!" She began to collapse.

"Don't faint," I snapped, "and don't let's play tennis." I was shaking. I reached into the crib. My hands closed around something that put ice-water in my vertebrae. It *was* a monster.

"It's got fur!" I whispered. I felt some more. "And clammy scales!" I lifted it out of the crib. "And a trunk!" I was determined to save baby. Baby cried!

We got some chairs and sat there for ten minutes close together while baby played with the invisible monster. "I don't know what to do!" I said. "It's alive. Maybe it's poisonous. But it's friendly. Maybe it's another baby!"

"From another dimension," said Mabel.

"Rot," I said; I think I picked that up from the detective in the Saturday Evening Post serial. "Let's keep our heads."

"If baby keeps his," said my

friend Mabel. That got me. "I've got to call Harry," I chattered. "They don't like him to be called at work, but I've got to call him."

"You'll just worry him," said Mabel. "Call the police."

"No!" I said. I felt like crying myself. Baby was so happy. Maybe the baby monster was happy, too. The police would do something awful to it. But what about my maternal instinct? Something told me I simply had to save my baby! "I've got to call Harry," I insisted, and I went to the 'phone.

The dial tone sounded peculiar, I remember, but I called Harry's place of employment. A brisk female voice cut in:

"What number are you calling, please?"

"Charlemont 7-890," I whispered.

"Sorry. You must have the wrong dimension." There was a click as she disconnected. I sat like a statue. A haggard statue with a greasy housedress on. A statue that hadn't plucked its eyebrows in two months. I had a lot of nerve. I was a bad mother, and a poor mistress. And I had a swell husband, who could lie like a trooper. I wasn't any good, I was ugly, I was greasy. I cried. "Mabel," I choked.

It took her awhile to get it out of me, and then her blue eyes flashed. "I told you!" she cried. "From another dimension!" In her broken-down green wedgies

she clattered toward the door. I heard her fighting it. She couldn't get it open. Then she tried a window. It opened, but she couldn't stick her hand out. She flung herself around.

"Stella," she said, with a quiver of that good-looking short upper lip of hers, "we're trapped in. We're in the middle of some kind of fantasy. It's a crazy world we're living in, Stella. A-bombs and H-bombs and flying saucers and space-flight — it's all the fiction stuff coming true. Now we're lost in some other dimension, and I have to get dinner in the oven."

"Please," I mumbled. "Let's don't get desperate about the wrong things." I tried all the doors and windows in the house, and it was true. We were trapped in. There was some barrier surrounding the house. There wasn't anything to see outside except a kind of grey steam.

We went back to check on baby. He was still playing with the monster. I bent over the crib and held a fluffy, fifty-cent toy bear out. The baby monster took it invisibly out of my hand. He shoved it at baby. Baby squealed so darned happily. And I began to get some perspective.

"Suspicion is wrong," I told Mabel. "All the time. That's what that article we read a couple months ago in *Your World* said. Remember you and I decided we'd never be suspicious. Maybe

that's the reason we're happy — if dirty. We don't suspect anybody of anything if we can help it — and now's no time to start. The monster is baby's friend."

Mabel shuddered. "Okay," she said. "But I'm still worried about getting dinner in the oven. Bill's liable to —"

"Hah, now you're being suspicious," I said, lousy with virtue. "Quit worrying. I'm going to call Harry again." This time I was a lot calmer. I decided to trust the universe a little more. I dialed Harry's number again. A scratchy male voice answered:

"Sorry, dis dimension is in use. Would ya please get off da line?"

I dug a few trenches and established a line of fire.

"Listen," I said. "I'm in trouble."

"A dame," he said wonderingly.

"Yeah, a dame," I cried. "What's so unusual about a dame? Why does every male in Kingdom Come get that note in his voice when he talks with a dame? Sure I'm a dame, a good-looking dame! I'd like to punch you in the eye to prove it!"

He laughed. He must have turned away from the 'phone. "It's a dame."

"Okay, find out what she wants."

"Spill it," he said into the 'phone. I spilled it. "What's that address again?" he asked. I told

him. "Naw, naw," he said impatiently. "The planet. The *planet*. And the year." I told him.

He must have turned away from the 'phone again, because I heard him say off-stage, "They're only ten years away." I was numb. He came back on the line. "And what's dis about a baby monster? Fur? Scales? A trunk? The size of Harry, Jr.? Ma'am, we'll be there in a jiff," and he hung up.

Mabel was nervously hanging on my ear, but I didn't get a chance to answer her questions. The door in the living room opened and they walked in.

For a second I saw a ship that looked like a cake-pan, hanging in the grey steam. Then they closed the door and grinned at us. Instinctively, Mabel and I tried to shrink our bust-lines.

"Hello," said the tall one. He scratched at his hairy chest and grinned wider. He was carrying a piece of machinery that looked like a camera on a tripod. "Lemme introduce myself," he said. "Jake Comstock. We come over to do you dames a favor. We'll kick you back where you belong."

"Yeah," I said, "I'll bet."

"And this here is Beany Rocine. He's my partner. We — uh — work together."

"Hi dere," said Beany. "Where's da monster?"

"Introductions," said Jake, casting him a hard look. "Manners."

So I introduced us. "I'm Mrs.

Weaver," I said. "And this is my neighbor, Mrs. Aspectia."

"Pleased ta meetcha, girls," grinned Jake. "You, Blondie," he was looking at me, "you must be the one talked on the 'phone. I liked the way you handled Beany. Real cute." He dropped the tripod thing in a corner, and sidled toward me. "Now where's this mon-ster?" he asked, slipping his hand around my bare arm and grinning down at me.

I knew better than to play rough, so I just looked down at his hand, and didn't stop looking at it until he took it away. He lost a lot of his grin. "So where is it?" he said, his voice turning hard and unpleasant.

"Don't worry about that," I said. "Matter of fact, I'm getting so the monster doesn't worry me. He's been playing with baby all day and baby hasn't objected. The main thing I'd like you gentlemen to do for us is to get busy moving us back to our own dimension."

"That's right," said Mabel, her hands on her hips. "And let us know right now what the charges are going to be, if any."

"No charge," said the runt Beany, staring fascinated at her legs. "'Cept we're taking da mon-ster wit' us. Real expensive, them monsters. Drinkos, they're called. Dey get lost in da dimensions now and then. Picked one up on Pluto

fifty years or so acome — or ago."

"Ago?" I said.

"Acome," he corrected.

"Listen," I said, making up my mind. "You can't have the monster. He's kept baby happy all day. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Tell me what he eats and what to do for him and I'll keep him. I've got twenty-five dollars in poker winnings you can have. Okay — Jake?"

Jake broke out laughing. "You kids are terrific," he said. "You don't know what the score is. You're cute!"

"Thanks," I said bitterly. "You restore my confidence. I feel myself blooming under your hungry gaze."

"Those Drinkos are worth a couple million credits, is what I'm getting at, and you offer us a stinkin' twenty-five dollars. Tell you what, Blondie." He winked at me. "You kids are over-worked. One look and you can tell that. Well, Beany and me have got a little cabin up on Dimension-L, cut off from everything. The four of us can go there and have a fine old time. We could stay there a month, and still get you back here in time to kiss your husbands when they get in from work. Whaddya say, Blondie? And you can keep the Drinko!"

"We are accepting no propositions this week," said Mabel with dignity.

"Ah-h, a coupla kill-joys,"

growled Beany, wandering off toward the hall.

Mabel looked at me and then picked up a vase off the mantle over the fire-place. I gave her the nod. "Stay away from that Drinko," she warned Beany, "or I'll let you have it."

Beany was annoyed. He stopped, looking imploringly at Jake. Jake giggled as if the whole thing tickled his sense of humor, and walked cat-footed toward Mabel. She let go the vase with a right-handed swing. He had his right arm out stiff in front of him, though, and the vase shied off and smashed against the television set. Then he grabbed Mabel in a bear-hug.

That set me off. I had a yearning for Harry, then. He would have laid these mugs out. And that's all they were — mugs, cheap crooks. I hopped on one leg, yanking off one of my oxfords. I brought the heel down on Jake's curly head. But it didn't do a thing for him, except make him mad. He brought his arm back, cursing at me. It caught me on my lipstick. I remember being surprised that he was actually knocking me out. But that's what he did.

When I woke up, the first thing I knew was that Harry, Jr., was screaming. I groggily stood up, and stepped over Mabel, who was just beginning to moan. I went to

the nursery and grabbed up my baby. "Don't cry," I begged him. "Don't be mad. I'll get your Drinko back. Those dirty thieves, I'll get it back." I held him under one arm, his pants dripping. I think I looked like a Pekinese, with my hair over my eyes. I went to the 'phone, dialed Harry's number, and got the same routine.

"I *don't* have the wrong dimension," I cried before the operator could hang up. "This is an emergency. A couple of crooks stole my Drinko. Please get me the dimension-police."

"You have a Drinko?" the operator asked cautiously. "There must be some mistake. You are calling from Earth? From 1954? I am sorry. Congress ruled Earth 1954 could not be connected with the dimension-system. It would be impossible for you to own a Drinko."

"Some crooks from 1964 stole my Drinko!" I insisted.

"One moment, please. The Supervisor informs me this is an unauthorized call. It will be necessary to conduct a police investigation." There were clickings, there were buzzings, there were groups of fuzzy, far-off voices, and finally the police came in.

"A couple of crooks stole my baby's Drinko!" I repeated loudly. "I demand my rights as a dimension-citizen!"

"Two thieves confiscated your Drinko," a dry voice said. "Very

well. Describe them, please. Describe characteristic phrases, expressions, and voice-intonations also." I described them. "Very good. Did you say Earth 1954? Excellent. Only a matter of six dimensions and thirty years. We shall investigate immediately." He hung up.

"Hi, Stella," said Mabel, up on one elbow and looking fuzzily at me. "You think I'll get out of this in time to get Bill's dinner in the oven? Bill's so darned touchy about dinner."

"Teach him a lesson, then," I snapped, disgusted with her, and running to the door, because somebody was knocking there. "Train him. Disappoint him. Break his pattern. Don't have dinner. Good evening, gentlemen," I said as I opened the door. The police came in. They had Beany. They had Jake.

There were three police. The one in front, a young, nice-looking one, touched his cap and smiled quietly. "Here's your Drinko, ma'am," he said, but I already knew the Drinko was back. Harry, Jr., stopped crying. He gurgled happily. Somehow, I was willing to bet, he could see the Drinko. I put him on the floor and the policeman put the Drinko on the floor. It was beautiful, those squeals that came from my baby. The young policeman smiled again, a quiet, tanned smile.

"We want to thank you, ma'am. These two are the worst criminals in the dimension-system. I want you to know you may have the Drinko as a reward for your part in apprehending them. Also, I wish to say that I admire you for your trippo in pretending to be a dimension-citizen, when, of course, you are not."

"Trippo?"

"Spunk, if you prefer."

"Well, I had to get my baby's Drinko back," I said.

"Naturally," he smiled. "Drinko's make wonderful pets. The day may come when Earth 1954 will be connected with dimension-system — and then more Drinkos will be available."

"Can't we," I asked, "just stay alone in our quiet nook of space?"

"My thought, too," said Mabel, getting to her feet at last and throwing her hair back. "And is there any chance of getting out of here? It's exciting, thrilling, and romantic, but Bill still has to eat."

"Immediately, Madam! It is merely a matter of disengaging the chrono-beam, which happened to become tangled, in space-time, with the gravitonic structure of the neutronic chrono-field."

"Well!" said Mabel. "That explains it! And so clearly!"

They set up an instrument that looked like the one Jake and Beany had. They sighted along the diagonals of the room and pressed buttons. Then they opened the door.

"In two minutes, ma'am," the smiling cop said. "Good day. It is my hope that we shall meet again." They disappeared out the door. Sure enough, there was a cake-pan ship hanging in the grey steam. They piled into it and the ship moved off, wobbling, until I couldn't see it any more.

A minute later, the grey steam melted away and so did Mabel.

Harry came home on schedule. "Baby has hardly cried all day!" I told him happily. "What a relief! I got a lot of your old clothes mended and I read three installments of the Saturday Evening Post serial."

"Fine!" said Harry, looking around. "What else happened?"

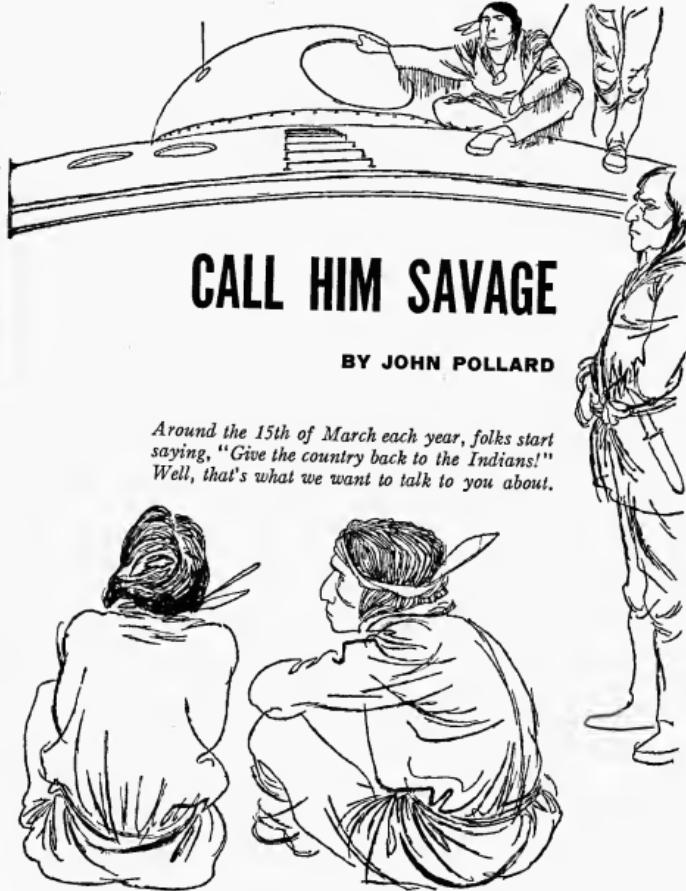
"Not much," I said, deciding to break it to him gradually. "Except we've got a Drinko." I took him into the nursery. Baby was sound asleep. I supposed the Drinko was, too. "There he is," I said, pointing to the depression at the foot of the crib. "That's the Drinko." I told Harry the whole story. He listened with a straight face.

"Well!" he said. "What thrilling adventures you have. Tell me, isn't this sort of thing sometimes too exciting?"

"Not at all," I said, deciding to feed his stomach before I really tried to convince him. "It all comes under the heading of the drab, routine duties of a housewife. Come on now, dinner's ready."



I DIDN'T even hear her come in. What with the Sioux rising against the white settlement at the fork of the Platte, the attack being set for dawn, and Chief Spotted Horse's impassioned speech to his braves, I wouldn't have heard anything under a ninety-seven-decible war whoop.



CALL HIM SAVAGE

BY JOHN POLLARD

Around the 15th of March each year, folks start saying, "Give the country back to the Indians!" Well, that's what we want to talk to you about.

Soft lips brushed the back of my neck and she said something.

"That's fine," I said.

"Sam!"

I heard *that*, all right. I looked up from the typewriter. "Hey, that's a *nice* nightgown!"

"I said I think I'm getting a cold."

"Well — with a nightgown like that . . ."

"Silly!" Her smile would have corrupted a bishop. "You coming to bed? It's almost midnight."

"Soon's I finish writing this chapter. Best thing I've ever done."

"More Indians?"

I reached for a cigarette. "Sure, more Indians. What else would one of the country's leading authorities on the original Americans be writing about? I hate to keep harping on the same subject, my sweet, but the dough from my last book bought you that mink stole you keep dangling in front of your girl friends."

"If you make so much money at it, why are you still a reporter?"

"I like being a reporter."

"What about *me*? Between reporting and Indians my love life is beginning to wither on the vine. You should have married a squaw."

"Who says I didn't?" I gave her my best leer and reached out an exploring hand. She blushed and backed away, laughing. "Noth-

ing doing, Sam Quinlan! You want me I'll be in bed."

"Hey-hey!"

She gave me a quick kiss, evaded my grasp and disappeared into the bedroom. I finished lighting the cigarette, typed a few more lines. But my working mood was gone, a casualty of a black lace nightgown. Finally I got up from the desk and snapped on the radio and, while it warmed up, strolled over to the living room window.

At this hour Washington was largely in bed. Away over to the east I could see the dim glow of lights marking the Mall, with the Capitol dome beyond that. Now that communism was dead, buried and unmourned in Russia and her satellites, with peace and prosperity booming from Iowa to Iran, even the President would be sleeping like a baby. Any day now I would be down to covering PTA meetings for the *Herald-Telegram*. That was okay with me; my big interest was "Saga of the Sioux" — the third in the series of books I was writing on the history of the American Indian.

An early autumn breeze crawled in at the open window and moved the line of smoke from my cigarette. A quiet serene night, with the faint smell of burned leaves in the air and the promise of a cool, sunny, peaceful tomorrow.

A lovely night, made far lovelier by the thought of the beautiful blonde waiting for me in the next room. After twelve years of marriage I still found her to be the most exciting and rewarding woman I had ever known.

"... most of eastern Colorado," the radio said suddenly, "as well as the western fringes of Nebraska and Kansas."

I turned the volume down. Weather report, probably, except that the announcer was making it sound like a declaration of war or a "sincere" commercial.

"We repeat," the voice continued, "since 8:10 this evening, Eastern Standard Time, literally nothing has come out of that section of the country. All communication has ceased, outbound trains and planes are long overdue, highway traffic out of the area has stalled."

"Sam?"

"Yeah?"

"You coming to bed?"

"... tuned to this station for further bulletins con —"

I clicked the set off. "Could I have three minutes for a fast shower?"

"Umm . . . I guess so."

"I," I told her, "am coming to bed."

Lois rattled the handle of the stall-shower door, and I shut off the water. "Yeah?"

"Telephone, darling."

"At this hour? Who is it?"

"Sounds like Purcell."

"For Crisake!" I came out and grabbed a towel. "This is worse than one of those Hollywood farces about honeymooners. What's he want?"

"I didn't dare ask him, he sounded so grumpy."

I kissed her. "About that night-gown . . ."

"You're getting me all wet!"

Purcell was night Editor at the *Herald-Telegram*, a small, intense, middle-aged, highly literate man. Years before, his wife had run off with a reporter, leaving Purcell with an undying hatred for all members of the profession.

His voice, over the wire, cracked like a whip. "Sam?"

"Listen, I'm off duty. You got any idea what time —"

"You're wanted at the White House. Now."

"The White House? You mean —?"

"The White House. The President wants to see you."

"The President! Cut out the gags, will you? I'm in no —"

"I don't kid with reporters, Sam. On your way."

The phone went dead. I stood there staring stupidly at the receiver. Lois had to shake my arm to get my attention. "What did he want?"

"The President wants to see me."

"You're joking!"

"Hunh-uh. Anybody but Pete Purcell, I'd agree." I put back the receiver and went over to the dresser for clean underwear. "Get back to bed, honey. I'll be home as soon as I get through running the Government. Can you imagine! The President wants to see me!"

She yawned and stretched, looking like the June page on an *Esquire* calendar. "Well, so much for my sheerest nightgown."

"Believe me, darling, if it wasn't the President —"

"I know. It would be an Indian."

I finished dressing while she sat on the bed with her knees drawn up to her chin, watching me. I kissed her thoroughly and patted her here and there and went downstairs. The night man in the garage under the building put down his *Racing Form* and dug my Plymouth out of a welter of chrome and glass.

I drove much too fast all the way.

A guard at the gate looked at my press pass and used a hidden telephone. Within not much more than seconds I was ushered into the Press Secretary's office. The Secretary, a badly shaken man if ever I'd seen one, had evidently been pacing the floor. He looked at me sharply out of pale, blood-shot eyes. "Your name Quinlan?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I see your identification?"

I handed him my wallet. He flipped through the panels holding my press pass, social security card, driver's license and a picture of Lois in a bathing suit. When he failed to do more than give the latter a casual glance I knew this was a man with a troubled mind.

I said, "Maybe you could give me kind of a hint on what's going on."

"Going on?" he repeated absently.

"You know — going on." I got off a nonchalant-type laugh that would have fooled anybody who was deaf. "I even heard that the President wanted to see me!"

He gave me back the wallet. "Ah — yes. Come with me, please."

We left the office and went down a hall, around some corners and down more halls, past a lot of doors, all of them closed. Finally he stopped in front of a pair of doors with shiny brass doorknobs, knocked twice, then turned the knob, said, "Mr. Quinlan, gentlemen," shoved me through with a jerk of his chin, and closed the door behind me.

I never saw him again.

There was a long table down the center of a long narrow room. The woodwork was white and the walls papered a dark green, with walnut-framed pictures here and there of the kind of men you see in albums of Civil War vintage.

But the men around the table were as modern as a jet bomber. There were five of them, three of whom I recognized on sight: Army Chief of Staff General Lucius Ohlmsted, Secretary of War Franklin McClave, and, seated at the far end of the table and looking even younger than his forty-nine years, the President of the United States.

The remaining two were just a couple of men to me: dark business suits, clean collars, manicured fingernails and the type of faces you see twenty of on any city block.

I walked on down the room, feeling as conspicuous as a cheer leader at a wake, while five pairs of eyes sorted me over molecule by molecule. When I reached the near end of the table, I stopped, resisted an impulse to salute, and stood there at attention.

The President managed to keep from smiling, although you could see he wasn't far from it. "Thanks for coming here so promptly, Mr. Quinlan. I'd like you to meet my associates."

He reeled off names and titles. The two strangers were a Mr. Proudfit and a Mr. Kramer, occupations not disclosed. Kramer was small and ageless, with a weather-beaten face and a mouth like a steel trap; while Mr. Proudfit had the look of a benign monk, until you saw the tempered

steel glint in his piercing eyes.

When introductions were completed, I said, "How do you do?" once, including them all, and went on waiting. Nobody suggested I sit down, probably because there were only five chairs around the table to begin with and the room's two couches were too far away to keep me in the group. The President gave me the same winning smile that had pulled a couple million extra votes his way in the last election, and said, "Let me start off, Mr. Quinlan, by telling you that we've got a problem on our hands — one that may very well involve the peace and well-being of the entire country. The details are going to strain your credulity beyond human limits, I'm afraid — just as they have ours. But there is enough supporting evidence to what we've heard for us to do something about it. And that's where you come in."

He paused, evidently waiting for a response from me. There was only one response I could make — even though I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about. "I'm at your service, Mr. President."

His smile was a medal for my chest. "Thank you. At this point I'd better let Mr. Kramer take over."

Kramer leaned back in his chair, placed the tips of his fingers together and stared search-

ingly at me over them. His voice, when he spoke, was as dry as his skin. "Mr. — ah — Quinlan, I understand you were born thirty-one years ago on a Potawatomi Indian reservation in the state of Michigan."

I blinked. "That's right. Not many people know it."

"You are part Indian, I believe?"

"One quarter Potawatomi."

"Also, I'm told that you are something of an authority on the history of the American Indian."

"I've written books on the subject and expect to write a good many more."

"You speak the language?"

"What language?"

He floundered a little. "Why — ah — the — ah — Indian language."

"Look, Mr. Kramer," I said, "there are scores of Indian languages. Nobody in history, red man or white, could ever speak all of them. Fortunately most Indians belonged to one of several great families, and the language of each family was close enough for the tribes in that family to understand each other. I can handle the language of the Algonkin like a native, being part Potawatomi myself. I can get by in the tongue of the Iroquois, the Caddoan, the Siouan, and the Muskogean. The Déné and Uto-Aztecans would give me consider-

able trouble, while the Penutian would be just about a blank."

I stopped there, and shrugged. "Sorry. I didn't mean to turn this into a lecture."

Kramer's weathered face stayed expressionless. "Are you familiar with the customs of Indians of, say, two hundred years ago?"

"With their customs, clothing, religions, food, taboos, cultures, weapons, or anything else you can think of."

Franklin McClave, the Secretary of War, cut in on us at this point. "I think, Bob," he said to Kramer, "that Mr. Quinlan qualifies for the job." His glance turned to me. "I'd like for you to meet a man waiting in the next room, Quinlan. I want you to hear his story, talk to him, ask him questions, then give us your opinion of the results. Do you mind?"

I spread my hands. "Whatever you say."

Kramer got to his feet and went over to a side door. He pushed it open, said something I didn't hear, then stepped rather quickly out of the way.

A moment later young Daniel Boone came out!

Of course, it wasn't really Daniel Boone at all. Leaving out the fact that the "dark and bloody ground" frontiersman had been dead nearly a hundred and fifty years, this man was a lot hand-

somer, with entirely different features. But he was wearing the fringed buckskin trousers and shirt, the beaded moccasins, the coonskin cap, and his coarse black hair hung almost to his shoulders. A powderhorn swung from his neck by a greasy cord, and he was holding on to a six-foot muzzle-loader as though it were his only contact with reality.

I stood there with my chin two inches from the rug and gawked at him. He was scared to death. His deep-set brown eyes rolled fearfully from side to side, with too much white showing around the irises. His clutch on the gun grew even tighter, whitening the knuckles of his hand.

Muscles crawled on my scalp. A strange tension seemed to fill the room. Kramer cleared his throat. "This man's name is Enoch Wetzel, Mr. Quinlan. I want him to tell you exactly what he told us earlier tonight."

I felt the tendons in my legs tighten, pulling me into a slight crouch. I was back a hundred and seventy years in the past, with a dull anger starting to move around in me. "Wetzel," I said, making it sound like a dirty word. "Any relation to Lewis Wetzel?"

The young man's eyes widened with astonishment and obvious relief. "Well, now, I reckon so! Lew's my uncle."

"Lew Wetzel," I said between

my teeth, "is a low, stinking, murdering skunk!"

I ducked just in time to keep from being brained by the swinging stock of the long gun. I came up under it quicker than I'd ever moved before in my life and nailed him on the jaw with a solid right, getting my shoulder behind it. It was like hitting the Hall of Justice. He grunted and up came the rifle butt for another try.

Suddenly the room was bulging with strangers. A dozen arms folded around the young man, the gun was ripped from his fingers and he hit the rug with a thump that shook the room. The buckskin-covered legs threshed briefly, then were still.

I moistened my lips and backed away as sanity returned. I looked at the frozen faces around the table. "My fault, Mr. President. I can't blame you for thinking I'm as crazy as he is. But, as Mr. Kramer mentioned, I'm part Indian. Back in the seventeen hundreds a frontiersman named Lewis Wetzel murdered a lot of Indians — men, women and children. I suppose you might say I went atavistic, or something, at hearing this fellow claim he was Wetzel's nephew. He's a screwball, of course, and I owe you a good solid apology for starting a ruckus."

The President wasn't smiling now. "Perhaps I should have told you before, Mr. Quinlan, we may desperately need this young man's

assistance in the near future."

I almost blurted out the wrong thing, but bit my lip instead and remained silent. The President's eyes swung to the heap of humanity on the floor. "Let him up, boys. I'll call you if I need you again."

The six Secret Service men rose and stood Enoch Wetzel on his feet, then returned to the adjoining office, not looking too happy about leaving a madman with the Chief Executive. Wetzel pushed the long hair off his forehead and stood there glowering at me, spots of angry color in his dark cheeks.

I said, "Forget it, Mac. I made a small mistake."

His thin lips peeled back in a snarl. "Halfbreed!"

I took it, although nothing was ever harder for me to do. Kramer hurriedly stepped into the breach. "Mr. — ah — Wetzel, we're waiting for you to repeat what you told us before."

The tall, broad-shouldered young man turned from me to face the long table. There was a graceful dignity about him, in his posture, in the way he held his head, that you don't see often. Again I felt the hair move along my scalp. For a guy who was as nutty as peanut brittle, he was certainly convincing in his role of frontiersman. Turn back the clock far enough and this could have been one of General An-

thonny Wayne's scouts at the battle of Fallen Timbers. He even smelled the part.

"My father got hisself put on by General Harmer as a scout a fortnight back. The General, on orders from President Washington, was to lead his sojers to the north after the Injuns up there. Pop allowed as I was ready to try my luck agin the abbregynes, so he took me along.

"Three-four nights after we set out ahead the rest, Pop an' me come onto fresh Injun signs. We move powerful careful through the woods an' right soon we catch sight of camp fires. There's a whole grist of them red devils prancin' around, all fixed out in war paint — more of 'em as I ever see'd afore. Even Pop allows as how it bugs out *his* eyes — and Pop's a man to do an amount of travelin'."

It was a page torn out of technicolor nightmare: three of the world's most important men hanging onto the words of a madman who claimed to be an Eighteenth Century Indian scout in the employ of one of George Washington's generals. Yet the man's every word, every gesture, everything he wore, was as authentic to that period as the powder horn around his neck.

"We draw back in the woods aways an' wait. It's gettin' along to'ard sun-up, an' Pop says he

aims to get a better idea how many Injuns they is, an' what tribes. Most of the braves got nice new British guns an' General Harmer'll want to know about that."

Wetzel's voice began to shake a little, remembering. "Pop an' me are hidin' in a clump of sumac when this here sudden racket starts up, equal to a hundred waterfalls goin' all at oncet. We look up in the air where it's comin' from, and holy hokey if fallin' right out of the sky ain't this round iron thing! Flat as a hoe-cake an' big around as an acre of land, with the fires of Hell breathin' at its edges!

"Well sir, them Injuns lit a shuck out of there like the spirits was after them. My legs were tryin' to run, too. But Pop takes a holt on my arm an' says, 'By Janey, I aim to see this if'en I swing for it!'

"It drops down," Wetzel continued, demonstrating with a slow graceful movement of his hand, "lookin' no less than a big shiny stove-lid, an' settles in the clearin' as light an' easy as the feather off'en a duck's back. It stands high as a Pennsylvania school house an' twicet the size around, an' no sound from it at all."

He stood slim and straight as a Shawnee arrow, smooth-faced and solemn, obviously not much past his twentieth birthday, yet by

his own account born before the Declaration of Independence was on paper. He went on talking, sounding like a character out of James Fenimore Cooper. His story, boiled down and translated, came out something like this:

The sudden arrival of the strange object had literally paralyzed the Indian encampment. The warriors dropped their weapons and called on the spirits to protect them, while a hole opened in the side of what couldn't be anything else but a spaceship. Then out of the opening came huge steel caricatures of men. There were over a dozen of these robots, each the height of two men, and their eyes were strange round circles of faceted glass. In single file they moved down the ramp and stalked through the ranks of fear-frozen Indians, disappearing into the forest.

Enoch's father ordered his son to crawl up into a tree out of sight, then shouldered his rifle and slipped away through the bushes to get a better look at what was going on. Enoch "allowed" that his Pop was a "moughy" brave man, and none of his audience gave him an argument on that score.

From his place among the leaves, Enoch watched his father melt into the trees. The sun was above the horizon by this time and the young frontiersman discovered that his present position

was the equivalent of a box seat on the fifty-yard line.

The next figure to emerge from the spaceship brought an amazed murmur from hundreds of throats. No twelve-foot robot this time, no alien monster beyond description. Very simply, this was an Indian.

Yet what an Indian! He stood on the ramp, wearing only leather breeches and unadorned moccasins, muscles rippling across a powerful sun-tanned chest, his head thrown back in a posture of arrogant dignity. He wore a single crimson feather in his black top-knot, and at his belt was a tomahawk only slightly less deadly looking than a howitzer.

Arms folded across his chest, he swept his stunned audience with an eye like an eagle's, then began to speak. His voice, deep and ringing, carried beyond the edges of the crowd, so that Enoch was able to catch a portion of what he was saying.

Wetzel admitted he understood very little of any of the Indian tongues. He thought the one he was hearing had its roots in the Delaware tribe, but admitted this was no more than a guess. However, it appeared that the visitor was summoning the chiefs of the assembled tribes to a meeting within the spaceship.

Evidently it took some doing. Faced with a familiar danger,

there is no human more courageous than an Indian. But the thought of entering the yawning maw of that steel cavern would have shaken the nerves of Manabus himself.

Finally the visiting Indian's oratory paid off, and nine or ten of the tribal leaders reluctantly entered the spaceship. Two robots took up positions on the ramp to discourage kibitzers, and after an hour or so in which nothing more happened, the rest of the camp returned pretty much to normal.

Mid-afternoon came and passed, and still the meeting inside the ship went on. Enoch was finding the tree branch not the most comfortable place to spend a weekend, and he was growing steadily more uneasy by his father's continued absence.

More hours passed. The sun was gone now and campfires began to dot the night. Orders or no orders, Enoch decided, he was going to find his Pop. With a stealth equal to that of any Indian, he dropped to the ground and began a cautious advance in the direction his father had taken hours before.

Suddenly the bushes crashed apart directly in front of him, and his father came bounding through. Only a few yards back, its giant strides rapidly closing the gap, came one of the huge steel men.

Enoch's gun flashed up and he

fired without aiming. The bullet struck one of the robot's huge eyes, shattering the glass and sending the towering figure crashing headlong into a tree. At the same instant, an ear-shattering wail came from the fallen robot, and powerful rays of light flashed from the rim of the spaceship to bathe the spot where the two Wetzels stood.

Mixed with the siren wail from the fallen man of steel came a chorus of blood-curdling warhoops as the Indians made out the figures of the two men, and a hundred braves came pouring across the clearing toward them. Instantly the two scouts took to their heels, darting through the inky blackness of the forest with the sure-footed celerity of long practice.

They would have escaped easily under ordinary circumstances. But suddenly the blast of another siren sounded directly ahead and a lance of light impaled them. Blinded, they stumbled aside, only to be caught by still another beam.

The two men split apart and dived for cover. Enoch, finding himself shielded from the rays by the thick bole of a tree, scrambled into its branches. A moment later the first wave of Indians passed below him.

For fully ten minutes he crouched there among the leaves. The barrage of light, he discovered, had

come from the towering robots, and he recalled the dozen or so steel monsters that had left the camp soon after the spaceship landed. Evidently they had been sent out to encircle the camp so that no one might leave or enter until the visitors permitted it.

Finally Enoch heard the Indians returning toward camp. He knew they would search every tree hunting for him. Reloading his rifle, he dropped to the ground and adopting the only maneuver they would not expect, made his way cautiously back toward the camp.

He had hoped to skirt the camp itself and find an avenue to freedom in the opposite direction. But his hopes were almost immediately dashed, for he soon made out the darting rays of light marking more of the robots.

Enoch was trapped. Taking advantage of every possible means of cover, he inched ahead, changing his direction a dozen times, until he suddenly stopped short, his path barred by the towering spaceship itself. Staying within the dense shadows at its base, he began to skirt the ship, hoping to find a place where he could hide out until the enemy gave up the search.

But again his luck failed to hold. This time he was stopped by a wall of metal fully ten feet high, which turned out to be one side

of the entrance ramp to the spaceship. Circling it would bring him right into the camp, to climb over it was impossible; to turn back, useless. This was the end of the line!

As he stood there trying to figure out his next move, he caught the sound of a guarded movement some distance behind him. Instantly he dropped to the grass, his long rifle ready to take at least one of his enemies with him. And that was when he learned that the bottom of the ramp was nearly two feet above the ground.

Even Macy's shopping service couldn't have furnished him with a better hiding place. Enoch wriggled himself under the edge and lay there breathing quietly, while, a moment later, three pairs of moccasined feet moved over the spot where he had been hiding.

Some time passed. He could hear voices very near and the rustle of feet moving through the grass. Then came the dull thud of metal against metal over his head in a rhythmic tempo like the tread of marching soldiers. Hardly had this ceased before he heard another sound which he could not identify, and the ramp itself began to move!

It was drawing in toward the ship, very slowly. To stay where he was would mean the loss of his hiding place; to try to run away would almost certainly be fatal.

And so Enoch acted in the only way left to him.

By hooking his arms and legs around the girders forming the underside of the ramp, he was able to lift himself clear of the ground. It meant being carried into the ship, but even that, he decided, was better than falling into the hands of Indians.

He clung there like a sloth to a branch. Fortunately the beams were recessed enough to prevent his being scraped off when he reached the opening into the hull. When the ramp finally ground to a halt he found himself in darkness beyond anything in his experience. There was cold metal under him now and he lowered himself gingerly onto it. When he tried to crawl into the open, he discovered that the edges of the ramp were now flush with the floor.

Suddenly a deep humming note tore at his ears, became a shrill whine, then passed into silence. The floor seemed to press harder and harder into his back, his lungs fought for air, a sharp burst of light seemed to explode soundlessly before his bulging eyes and consciousness left him. . . .

The rasp of metal against metal aroused him. The ramp was moving again. Once more he attached himself to its girders and was slowly carried from the spaceship. Sunlight on the grass told him the night had passed, and the moment the ramp came to a halt, he

dropped to the ground and squirmed into the open. He was close enough to the ship to keep from being seen by those aboard, and he slipped quickly around one side before making a break for the shelter of a clump of trees bordering the clearing.

"And that, Mr. Quinlan," Kramer said, "just about brings you up to date. At 4:07 this afternoon Mr. Wetzel was found by the crew of an Army tank twelve miles west of Burdette, Colorado. He told his story to the colonel in charge of that perimeter of operations, and was then flown directly to Washington." He paused and allowed himself a humorless smile. "I assume you have some questions?"

I said, "I'm not going to ask if you take this man's story seriously. Considering the positions of the men in this room you obviously do. What I'd like to know is why?"

Kramer hesitated. "Let me ask you this, Quinlan," he said, choosing his words carefully. "Based solely on this man's costume and speech, would you say he is an impostor?"

"No," I told him promptly. "Frontiersmen dressed exactly that way, the long gun is authentic and his pronunciation, phrases and idiom comes straight out of pre-Revolutionary times. But I still fail to see why you give a

second thought to his story."

"You don't think it true?"

"My God, man, how can it be? Unless you're trying to tell me that this character was brought here by a time machine!"

"One moment, Mr. Quinlan." Secretary of War McClave was back in the picture. "Let me tell you why we do not regard Mr. Wetzel as a mental case. Shortly after one o'clock this afternoon, Rocky Mountain Time, a section of Washington County, Colorado, roughly thirty miles in circumference was suddenly cut off from the rest of the country — cut off as completely as though it never existed. Telephone lines ceased to function, a radio station in the same area went off the air in the middle of a soap commercial. All traffic, vehicular and foot, ceased to come out of it. The Governor of Colorado sent in a detachment of the National Guard; nothing has been heard from it since. Air observers report all cars and trains appear to have stalled. Two planes trying a bit of hedge-hopping apparently conked out and were forced to land. No radio contact with them."

I said, "I heard some of this on a news broadcast shortly before midnight tonight. According to the announcer the area involved was larger than thirty miles."

McClave nodded soberly. "The affected area is expanding steadily. It now reaches as far west as

Strasburg, Colorado, and as far east as the Nebraska state line. The north and south limits seem to be somewhat narrower."

I looked at him and at the other men around the table. Their faces held a quiet tautness, and General Ohlmsted's hand, holding a cigar, was shaking a little. "And," I said, "you feel that this spaceship holds the answer. Is that it?"

"It's all we have to go on," the President said softly.

"One more question," I said. "Where do I fit into this?"

There was a moment's awkward silence, broken by the creak of the chair holding the man who had been introduced to me as a Mr. Proudfit. His round face smiled at me almost jovially.

"I expect I'm the one to explain that, Mr. Quinlan. Wetzel tells us the man in charge of the spaceship appeared to be an Indian. It seems our best move is to send an emissary into the blacked-out section to learn the reason for this — well — this attack. Such a representative should be qualified to deal intelligently with this — this Indian. Somebody able to understand the Indian temperament. In short, Mr. Quinlan, you!"

I rubbed a hand along the back of my neck and smiled. "You know, this whole thing is utterly mad! Indians, time machines, robots, spaceships! But then these days the most fertile imaginations

can't seem to keep up with reality. If you gentlemen want me to try to get to this Indian and ask him what's the big idea, I'll do my best. Not because I want to, but because I wouldn't know how to go about refusing the President of my country."

Some of the tension seemed to go out of the room. The President said, "You won't find me or your country ungrateful, Mr. Quinlan," and the Secretary of War nodded approvingly, and General Ohlmsted's cigar stopped shaking. Proudfit took out a sheaf of papers from an inner pocket of his coat, leafed through them quickly and handed one to me. "This authorizes you as a representative of the United States Government, answerable only to the President, and with full authority to act accordingly."

"Fine," I said, putting it away. "Maybe I can use it on these robots Wetzel mentioned!"

Proudfit looked at his strap-watch. "An Army jet bomber will take you and Mr. Wetzel to a point as close to Burdette, Colorado, as can be managed. Wetzel tells us he can locate the spaceship from that point. We don't know, of course, how closely guarded the ship is — or even if it's guarded at all. But Wetzel is confident his training and background as a frontiersman and Indian fighter can get you there under cover of darkness. Once you

reach the spaceship, the rest is up to you."

"And if I don't make it?"

Proudfit spread his hands. "Two companies of Army regulars entered that area at 6:30 tonight. They were fully armed, with orders to use those arms if necessary. Nothing has been heard from them since. We're sending you on the theory that where many can't get through perhaps one or two can. You have until noon — slightly more than eleven hours from now — to get word to us. If we don't hear from you by then or if the 'dead' area continues to expand after that time, then we throw our Sunday punch!"

Enoch Wetzel was still standing exactly as he had while telling his story. I walked over to him. "Let's get one thing straight, mister. If you and I are going to work together, we leave personal feelings out of it. A few minutes ago I passed a remark or two about one of your relatives and you tried to knock my head off. I'm willing to forget it if you are. But I don't want any more cracks out of you about my being a half-breed. Is that clear?"

He eyed me stonily, then without change of expression spat on the rug within a quarter-inch of my left shoe. I felt the muscles in my arms twang like plucked wires as I resisted the impulse to swing on him. "Is that your answer, Wetzel?"

"I'll git you thar," he said tonelessly. "I promised these yere gennelmen I'd do thet much. But it don't hold I gotta cotton to you."

We stood there staring into each other's eyes. There was a wall of hatred between us that could never be destroyed, a wall not fashioned by us but by our forefathers generations before. Yet a chain of incredible events had made us allies against an alien foe. In spite of our mutual dislike we must work together.

I turned back to Proudfit. "I'll need a pair of heavy black basketball shoes, dark coveralls, a good heavy sweater, a .38 Colt automatic with plenty of ammunition, and a compass."

The bomber pilot was a fresh-faced youngster who chewed gum and claimed to have been the second-ranking tennis player in Des Moines, Iowa. He shook hands gravely with me, eyed Wetzel and his strange garb and outsize rifle with blank-faced wonder, and mentioned that it was a nice night for flying.

The plane took off at 1:27. We were due over our target by 4:00 o'clock Eastern Standard Time, or 2:00 Mountain Time. The plans called for the bomber to fly at a high altitude, then come in on Burdette with jets off and drop us by 'chute. Wetzel had balked for a while at the idea of stepping

off into space, but a brief but patient explanation of how a parachute worked finally brought him grudgingly around.

The trip seemed to take forever. I was torn by a thousand doubts, saddened by not being allowed to say goodbye to Lois, not a little afraid of what I would likely run into in Colorado. And all the while, my companion, out of his normal world and time, surrounded by wonders beyond his wildest nightmares, slept sound as an infant. . . .

A hand shook me awake. In the faint glow of a flashlight I made out the face of the co-pilot. "Twenty minutes, Mr. Quinlan."

Wetzel was already on his feet. The co-pilot helped us don the 'chutes, and five minutes before arrival opened the heavy side door. A rush of wind tore in, but there was no other sound. The jets had already cut off and the plane was gradually losing altitude in a shallow dive. As this was not a plane used for parachute troops there was no wire to hook the 'chute cord to. It meant we would have to pull our own, but both of us had been thoroughly versed in what to do.

"Get ready," shouted the co-pilot.

I grasped the door frame and waited, my heart pounding in my ears. Wetzel stood directly behind me, the muzzle-loader in his hand, the tail of his coonskin cap bounc-

ing in the wind, his eyes narrowed.

"Five," the co-pilot said suddenly. "And a four, and a three, and a two, and a one — *target!*"

I dived headfirst into blackness. I spun madly earthward, but in the back of my mind a calm voice counted off the seconds. Then I yanked at the ring-cord, black folds of nylon rustled above me, I heard a sharp report like the crack of a giant whip, the straps at my shoulders yanked painfully, and I was floating gently down toward the night-shrouded surface of Colorado.

I landed in a meadow, if that was what they called it this far west. I came down hard but in the way they had told me would prevent injury. There was no wind to yank me about before I could unship the parachute, and within seconds I was on my feet and searching for some sign of Enoch Wetzel.

Unexpectedly a hand struck me lightly on the back. I was jumping aside and reaching for my gun when the frontiersman's quiet voice reached me. "You scare mighty easy for an Injun."

I said, "We should be about a mile, two at the most, south of the road where that Army tank picked you up yesterday afternoon. Let's find it."

"Aye."

The land was by no means as flat as I had expected. Fortunately

most of it was relatively open, with only scattered clumps of trees and bushes. There were too many small unexplained night sounds, but none of these appeared to alarm Wetzel in the slightest, so I managed to ignore them. Once we flushed a long-eared rabbit, and it was five minutes before I could get my heart out of my throat.

A barbed-wire fence, the first we had encountered, told me we had reached a road. It wasn't paved or even graveled — just a ribbon of dirt pointing east and west as straight as an Apache lance. Nothing moved along it in either direction as far as I could see. A line of telephone poles bordered one side.

"Recognize any landmarks?" I asked.

Wetzel shook his head.

"We're probably east of where you were found," I said. "We might as well start walking."

He grunted in agreement and we started out. It was a lovely starlit night, no moon at this hour, and a lot warmer than I had expected for October in Colorado. Now and then the road dipped and climbed, and as we reached the crest of the third hill, I saw a good-sized farmhouse set well back from the road among a group of out-buildings.

I pointed to the house. "Maybe they can tell us what's been happening around here."

Wetzel nodded and we turned in at a fieldstone path leading across the large yard to the front door. There were no lights visible from within, no dog barked, no rustle of livestock in the barns or pens.

I saw him just before I stepped on his head. He was lying across the path in the shadow cast by a gnarled tree, a stocky man in overalls and a blue work shirt. A double-barrelled twelve-gauge shotgun lay on the ground near his right hand. One side of his chest was black with a sticky substance that could have been only one thing, and the top of his head was black in the same way, except that no hair was there anymore. . . .

"Scalped!" I whispered hoarsely.

Enoch Wetzel stooped suddenly and picked up the shotgun and wordlessly held it out to me. My jaw fell in astonishment. The twin barrels were bent into a rude V.

I licked my lips and backed away. "Let's get out of here, Wetzel."

He tossed the gun aside and we turned back to the road. Neither of us said anything for fully a mile. "No human hands could have done that to a gun," I said. "I'm beginning to believe what you said about robots. Robots that take scalps!"

Another hill, another valley . . . and Wetzel caught hold of

my arm. "I come across them sojers about here," he said.

"Okay. From now on you act as guide."

We went on. Several times Wetzel's long, swinging, tireless stride left me behind and he was forced to wait until I caught up with him again. I had the feeling that I was holding him back, and there was something faintly contemptuous in his obvious patience. But the life of a book-writing newspaper man hadn't prepared me for cross-country marathons, and there was nothing to be done about it now.

The fairly level, open ground was giving place to a heavily wooded countryside. After another mile of winding roadway, Wetzel suddenly turned aside and plunged into the forest. It was as dark as the inside of an undertaker's hat, and after I had banged into a few dozen trees and tripped over a few dead branches, making enough racket to alert half the state, Wetzel slowed his pace to a crawl.

Finally I grabbed one of the fringed sleeves of his buckskin shirt to stop him and sank down on a fallen log. "How much farther?"

He leaned his folded arms on the muzzle of his long gun and I could feel his deep-set eyes studying me without approval. "'Nother hour; p'rhaps more. Dependin' on you."

"Sure," I said with understandable bitterness. "I'm not the man my granddaddy was. Nobody is. When I take a walk it's down to the corner for a pack of cigarettes. Anything farther than that I use a horseless carriage. We don't need steel muscles and superior woodcraft these days, brother. Just enough eyesight to read the directions on the can, ears sharp enough to hear the boss bawling you out, enough nose to smell the whiskey on your neighboring straphanger's breath, reflexes quick enough to avoid being run down by some politician's Cadillac. If I'd have known I was going to be called on to go batting around a jungle, I'd have been down to the Y five days a we —"

He moved like a striking snake. A hand was clapped over my mouth and a knee forced me to the ground. Before I could make an effort to fight back, he placed his mouth close to my ear. "Danger! 'Tis death for so much as a broken twig!"

He removed his hand and I could breathe again. We lay there side by side close to a huge tree, deep in the shadows. And then faintly as from far off I heard the crackle of disturbed undergrowth and, slowly louder and louder, an evenly spaced thumping sound that seemed to shake the earth.

Through the trees it came, directly toward the spot where Wetzel and I hugged the ground. It

loomed against the night, a tower of steel on jointed legs, a horrible travesty of the human figure, a head like King Arthur's helmet. Starlight picked out two round faceted eyes of glass.

My suddenly dry mouth puckered with the taste of terror. I did not breathe; even my heart seemed to beat no more. I wanted to close my eyes, but even the lids seemed paralyzed.

For almost a full minute the giant robot remained standing less than ten feet from where Wetzel and I were lying. It seemed to sense the presence of something of flesh and blood nearby. Its head turned slowly from side to side in little uneven jerks that put ice cubes in my veins. Finally the mammoth feet began their rhythmic thumping and a moment later it disappeared among the trees.

After what seemed a long time Wetzel rose to his feet. I got up slowly and leaned against the tree. "In a little while," I said softly, "I'll wake up. I'll be in bed with my wife, under the nice clean white sheets, and I'll know all this was a nightmare brought on by that canned salmon we had for dinner."

This, I told myself sharply, wasn't getting me anywhere except next door to hysteria. I ground my teeth together, shuddered uncontrollably for a second

or two, then was all right again. Or nearly so.

"Let's go," I said.

An hour or so later, after taking a twisting route through what seemed to be the Belgian Congo, Wetzel halted under the spreading branches of a towering cottonwood. With his lips close to my ear, he whispered, "It's a-settin' out thar midst open ground." He gestured at the wall of blackness hemming us in — blackness you could have cut into hunks with an ax. "I'm thinkin' thar's plenty 'o them iron critters roamin' 'round twixt us an' it. You aimin' to await the dawn?"

"You," I said, "said it!"

The dawn came up nice and quiet. Blackness turned gray and then a pearl pink — and there she was: a hundred yards from us, of some gleaming metal resembling aluminum, twenty feet high and covering about as much ground as a caretaker's cottage. It resembled nothing more than a soup plate turned bottom up to dry.

A tall, semi-circular opening showed black in one side, with a sloping metallic ramp reaching from it to the ground. Two robots guarded the entrance, stiff and towering and without movement, the early light glistening along their jointed bodies.

In sharp contrast to this scene from the distant future was the anachronistic spectacle of six In-

dians, in war paint, fringed buckskin and stripped to the waist, squatting around a small cooking fire near the ship. Within easy reach of each was a long bow and a quiver of arrows.

Nothing about them gave me a certain clue as to which Indian family they belonged to. The single feather in each scalp lock was pure white with a vivid red tip. Two of them wore the black paint of untried warriors, and all were gnawing on strips of meat grilled over the fire.

Wetzel, placid and silent, leaned on his rifle and calmly stuffed a cheek with a twist of black tobacco. "Reckon they be a little hard to talk to?" he asked in a soft voice.

I shrugged. "Only one way I know of to find out."

"Thet fancy pistol you got could kill 'em all afore they get them bows unlimbered."

"Are you suggesting I shoot them down without warning?"

It was his turn to shrug. "They be Indians."

The complete lack of feeling in his tone infuriated me. "You cold-blooded bastard! I happen to be a good part Indian myself."

He eyed me without expression but with a chill glitter to his eyes. "Aye. I ain't forgettin' thet," he said, and spat.

I took a slow breath and waited until I could trust my voice. "I'm going out there," I said quietly.

"Cover me with your gun. But don't use it *unless* it's the only thing left to do. I don't want that trigger pulled until the last possible second. They may grab me, they may even knock me around a little. That I can take. But don't try to interfere until there's no other way out. Is that clear?"

"Aye."

I turned away from him. All I had to do now was step out from behind that tree and walk across the open ground. Each of my feet suddenly weighed a ton. Two steps into that clearing and the funeral could be Monday. Instinctively my hand crawled toward the .38 automatic hidden in my coveralls. It never got that far. Suicide was so final.

Wetzel's firm young mouth held an almost invisible sneer. Deliberately I took out a cigarette, lighted it with an airy gesture and a match, dragged deeply on it twice and threw it away. I said, "Lay off that gun like I told you," and walked slowly out into the clearing.

It got a rise out of them, all right. They were on their feet, arrows notched, before I had traveled three feet. I never even hesitated. Once I had gone this far, the bluff had to be carried all the way out. I kept my spine stiff, my head erect, my hands conspicuously empty at my sides. If my nerves were jumping I was

the only one who knew about it.

It caught them just a shade off-balance, which was all I had hoped for. The one-sidedness of six drawn bows against one unimpressive and unarmed man eventually registered and the flint tips wavered, then turned aside.

The tallest of the braves — a lean number the color of an old penny — tossed his bow aside and deliberately stepped squarely in my path. There was an insolent arrogance in every line of his body — a body that topped my six feet a full three inches.

I said, "Hi-yo, Silver," and put my hip into his naked belly and grabbed his arm and threw him over my shoulder. He hit face first two yards away and plowed up a furrow of grass, flopped around a little, then lay still.

Nobody else moved, except me. I started for the spaceship again, not hurrying and not crawling, head still up, spine still stiff, eyes straight ahead. Feet slithered in the grass behind me and the sound made the skin between my shoulder blades twitch like an aching tooth. Every instinct that had anything to do with self-preservation was fighting to make me turn around.

That was when the robots moved. They seemed to come alive at the same instant, metal clanged on metal as they strode stiffly down the ramp to meet

me. Violence hung over them as it hangs over a Patton tank.

Every step toward them was like pulling my foot out of quicksand. Only twelve kinds of a cretin would have gone on when faced with anything like this. I went on. I couldn't do anything else. Once you show an Indian a molecule of cowardice, you're twelve lines on the obituary page.

The space between us was down to a narrow ribbon of grass by this time. Four — three more steps and I would *have* to stop. Nobody could push aside a couple of tons of animated steel. Metal arms were lifting slowly, preparing to close on me. Inside me a silent voice screamed a prayer for Wetzel to pull that trigger and pump a bullet into one of those round, staring, faceted eyes. . . .

The robots seemed to go dead. They hung there motionless, arms lifted, each with a massive foot caught in midstride.

What had stopped them at the last possible second I had no way of telling. All I did know was a sudden release of tension that left me with just enough strength to keep my feet moving.

I went on.

The edge of the ramp was getting uncomfortably close. I was here to see the head man, but I would prefer to see him out in the open. The thought of walking

into that black hole left me as cold as a barefoot Eskimo.

The ramp. It was a good six feet wide, made of what seemed to be some form of an aluminum alloy, and was waiting to be walked on. I started up its shallow slope, the rubber soles of my basketball shoes soundless on the smooth surface.

He appeared suddenly, without warning, in the doorway. He was quite tall, slim in the hips, and his naked shoulders seemed almost as wide as the opening. Elaborate beadwork designs had been worked into the buckskin breeches, and his headdress resembled a Sioux warbonnet, its twin rows of red-tipped feathers hanging almost to his moccasins. A hunting knife hung in a snake-skin sheath at his right hip. He was as gauntly handsome as a Blackfoot — and they don't come any better-looking than that.

He stood there, arms folded across his chest, looking as immovable as Pike's Peak. This time I stopped. My back was as stiff as his, my head as erect, my shoulders as square if not as wide. For a long time we stood that way staring straight into each other's eyes, our expressions blank, our tongues locked.

When enough time had passed for me to open the conversation without being accused of impetuosity, I said, "I am Long Rock, of the Potawatomi. I have

come in peace, to hold counsel with you."

My words, in the language of the Delaware because of Wetzel's earlier remark, had no immediate effect, which was par for the course with any Indian. Not even his eyelids moved. The silence went on, building into tension. Anyone unfamiliar with the ways of the Indian would have taken another stab at it. I knew better. I had made my pitch; now it was strictly up to him.

Finally his strong lips came unstuck. "I am Lo-as-ro, War Chief of the Kornesh." It was the Delaware tongue, all right, but with inflexions and nuances strange to me. "How is it that your skin is white but you speak in the way of the Orbiwah?"

That last word, I judged, was what the Indian in general was called wherever this specimen had come from. I said, "In my blood is the blood of the Orbiwah. That is why I am here, sent by the Great Chief of all white men."

We squatted down facing each other on the ramp. At once a young brave brought out a long, elaborately carved peace-pipe. Lo-as-ro put the bit to his mouth and puffed smoke toward the four cardinal points of the compass, then passed the pipe to me. The tobacco was far more aromatic than any I had come across before.

With the amenities out of the way, the Chief said, "Why has the White Chief sent you to me?"

"To welcome you to the land of the white man."

"I come not to the land of the white man in peace."

My eyes were as cold as his own. "This we do not understand. The white man has no quarrel with the tribe of Kornesh."

"The white man," Lo-as-ro said sonorously, "has taken from the Orbiwah his land and his home. He has driven the Orbiwah into small areas. He has killed buffalo and the bison and the deer, leaving the Orbiwah to eat the meat of the horse or to starve. The Orbiwah has been made foul with the diseases of the white man."

"All this," I said, "was long, long ago. Perhaps it was not right, but it is the way of life that the strong prevail and the weak perish."

His expression darkened. "You say this — you with the blood of the Orbiwah in your veins?"

"I speak only true words, noble Lo-as-ro. The white men are in number as the leaves of the forest, the Orbiwah few and helpless."

One of his hands made a graceful motion. "I have come to return the land to the Orbiwah, to restore him to the greatness of his fathers. Once more the land shall

be alive with game, the rivers filled with fish. Once more shall the Orbiwah hunt with the weapons of his fathers. I have spoken."

"From whence do you come?" I asked.

He pointed dramatically toward the sky. "From a great distance. Up there are many worlds."

"Tell me of your world," I said.

The telling took a long time but not a word of it was dull. According to Lo-as-ro, his world was a planet revolving about one of the stars in the Big Dipper. It was slightly smaller than Earth, with about the same climates and development of life. It was peopled with only one race, the Orbiwah, who lived much as the Indians in America did before the arrival of the white man. Recently spaceships from another planet in the same solar system had landed on the Orbiwah world. These newcomers were friendly, had no thought of conquest, and possessed a science and culture of amazing proportions.

From them the Orbiwah learned of a planet on which were men of their own kind. Lo-as-ro, fired by the thought of establishing contact with people like himself, had borrowed spaceships manned by robots and crossed the void to Earth. For weeks they had hovered in our atmosphere, at first saddened, then angered, by the

fate meted out to the Indians.

Since the spaceships were able to move through Time into the past, Lo-as-ro hit on the idea of going back to the days when the Indian was still in control of most of America. With the power at his control he could force the white man from the continent and restore the land to those who owned it.

Arriving near the close of the Eighteenth Century, he found a sizeable encampment of Indians, brought the ship down among them, and summoned the chiefs to a Council of War, where he outlined to them his plan. To his astonishment he found the chiefs suspicious of outside help and confident that they could defeat the white man alone. In vain did Lo-as-ro explain that they were doomed; they could not, or would not, believe that he had visited the future. He offered to take them ahead and let them see for themselves — an offer that was quickly refused.

Whereupon Lo-as-ro decided to return to the Present and wrest the land from the white man and hand it over to the downtrodden remnants of a once-powerful race. It was on that return trip that Wetzel had arrived in the present century.

When Lo-as-ro finished, I leaned back against the side of the ship and lit a cigarette, bringing a startled grunt from the chief. I

said, "You cannot defeat the white man, Lo-as-ro. He has weapons such as you have never dreamed: machines that can throw things that explode and kill hundreds of braves at one time, machines that travel through the air as does the one you came in, things that can wipe out all life within a circle as wide as a brave can ride around in one day on a fast horse."

"No, noble Lo-as-ro. Return to your world and leave this one to the white man. He took it long ago and he will never give it up. I have spoken."

The chief of the Orbiwah smiled grimly. "In the ship in which I arrived on your world is a small machine. It is working for me now. Within its reach no weapon is useful, no explosion can take place, no signal can be sent. Only Man is not touched by this machine, but when it works he has no weapons with which to fight. Each hour the influence of this machine widens. Soon all this land will be helpless. Then the robots will take charge and those who oppose them will be slain."

I thought of the "dead spot" I had first heard about on the newscast the night before, and how it was steadily growing. I remembered the slain farmer with the missing scalp, the two companies of soldiers helpless without radio, guns and transportation.

I thought of a mechanized America helpless before a few score of these spaceships . . . and I knew that counter-violence would be useless.

"Give the country back to the Indians!" The cry of the overburdened citizen. It seemed it was about to come to that!

For a long time I sat there, thinking, trying to hit on an answer that would save my country. And when the answer finally stirred at the back of my mind, it was so completely bizarre that I almost missed it entirely. . . .

"Noble Lo-as-ro," I said, "I must return to the Great White Father and tell him what I have learned. I will tell him that there is nothing to be done to oppose the Chief of the Kornesh. Within a few hours I will return with his reply."

Lo-as-ro inclined his fine head in assent. "Let it be so."

"Until my return," I said, "let the influence of the machine draw back until it holds helpless only a small section of land about your ship. Only in this way will I be able to return quickly to the White Chief."

Again Lo-as-ro agreed. I took my leave of him ceremoniously, and a few minutes later Wetzel and I were hurrying back toward the highway.

Four hours later I was on my way back, this time with four

companions. The plane landed us at the edge of the newly set "dead spot" and the five of us forced our way through the forest until we reached the clearing where the spaceship still crouched.

A silent group of Indians watched us as we crossed the open ground. This time the two robots flanking the doorway did not leave their posts. As I came up the ramp with my companions, Lo-as-ro appeared in the doorway of the ship.

He eyed me and the others without expression. I said, "Noble Lo-as-ro, I have brought with me four of my world's Orbiwah. They have come to hear your plan for them and their people. I have told them nothing of what you said to me, only that you have come from another world and are of their blood."

One by one I presented my companions. Yellow Arm was Johnny Armin, an old school friend of mine; Iron Eagle, with whom I had spent a year in Korea, had his telephone listed under the name of Luke Riegel; Strong Wind was Sidney Storm, whom I had met while spending a year in Southern California; and Lone Pine, known as Lionel Patterson, lived a few doors down the street from me in Washington and shot eighteen holes any day in the low seventies.

The color of their skins, the

unmistakable cast of their features, made up the only passport they needed. At the chief's invitation we squatted in a rude circle at the top of the ramp, and the peace-pipe was brought out and passed around.

Presently Lo-as-ro began to speak. The magnificent voice rolled out in tones like a cathedral organ, explaining how the American Indian was to assume his rightful place in a world of his own. It was a vivid picture, painted by an orator equal to any of the almost legendary Indian speakers, and they don't come any better.

Unfortunately I was the only one present who could understand him.

When it was over and Lo-as-ro was smiling in confident expectation of their gratified excitement, Johnny Armin gave me a baffled glance. "What the hell was *that* all about, Sam?"

I said, "You guys don't know how lucky you are. The chief, here, is going to fix it up for you to go back to the good old days. Be noble red men. No more taxes, no more taxis. Live out in the fresh air, sleep under the star-studded sky, drink the unchlorinated spring water."

"*What!*"

"You heard me. And he can do it, too. He's got the tools to flatten the country."

They stared at me and at each other, horror and anger hardening their faces. Lo-as-ro had stopped smiling and was glancing about the circle in obvious bewilderment.

"You mean he's doing all that for *us*?" Storm demanded.

"For all Indians," I said. "Free them from the iron heel of the oppressor, and all that."

"Nuts, brother!" Iron Eagle snapped. "Tell him I'm a graduate of Carnegie Tech, make twenty-five grand a year with Standard Oil, and vote the Republican ticket. If he thinks for a goddam minute I'm going to chasing around on a pinto pony hunting buffalo, he's got rocks in his head!"

"And that goes for me — double!" Lone Pine growled. "I never heard anything so screwy!"

I repeated what they had said, putting it into words Lo-as-ro could understand. He had the look of a man who couldn't believe his ears. "They speak with stupid tongues," he cried. "Do they deny the blood of their fathers?"

"They live as they want to live, noble chief," I said. "They are grateful for your wish to help but they ask me to decline the offer."

He came to his feet with a bound, his lean face hardening into a copper mask of anger. "These are not true Orbiawah!" he thundered. "These are as

women, soft with idleness and pleasure, weakened by their white conquerors. The land is not for them; it is for those forced to live in degradation and squalor, dying of hunger and disease, ignored by the white chiefs. It is they who shall be given back the ways of their fathers, that they may become a great Orbiwah nation once more. I have spoken!"

"Look at these braves," I said. All of us were standing now. "Of all the Orbiwah in this world it is such as these who could hope to survive under the conditions you wish to establish. The Orbiwah *you* describe would starve amid a thousand buffalo, they would fall from their horses, they would flee in battle. Take away the protection of the white chiefs and they would die."

The chief of the tribe of Kornesh curled his lips in a sneer. "The protection given by the white chiefs is the protection of death. They do not care what happens to the Orbiwah. I have seen it with my own eyes."

"You're right," I said promptly. "The Orbiwah has been badly treated too long. I shall return to the Great White Chief and tell him this: unless the life of the Orbiwah is made good, unless he has fine shelter, plenty of food, warm clothes for his back and the right to be as other men, you will return and force the white man

from this land. It will take much time, but it shall come to pass. *I* have spoken."

Doubt flickered in his eyes. "Perhaps your words are empty. How do I know they are true?"

"When twenty summers have passed," I said, "come back again. Look upon the Orbiwah and learn if they still suffer want and privation. If their life is not better for what has happened today, then you need never trust the white man again."

For a long moment he stood stiff as steel, staring into my eyes. Then his hand shot up, palm out, in a gesture of farewell, and he turned and disappeared into the spaceship.

I got a barrage of questions then. I held up a hand to quiet my friends. "Some other time, gentlemen. I've got to get to Washington just as fast as a jet plane can get me there."

"If it's that urgent," Luke said, "call him on the phone and reverse the charges."

I scowled at him. "Call who?"

"The President. Isn't he the reason you're in such a hurry?"

"No! I've got to get to bed."

"Bed? If you're that tired —"

"Who said anything about being tired?" I demanded. "Being tired has nothing to do with it."

"Then what —"

"It seems," I said, "there's a black lace nightgown . . ."

THE CUCKOO CLOCK

BY WESLEY BAREFOOT

You know a murderer prays on your household — lives with you — depends on you — and you have no defence!

DEATH wore the seeming of a battered Chevrolet.

The child's scream and the screech of rubber on concrete knifed through two seconds of time before snapping, like a celery stalk of sound, into aching silence. The silence of limbo, called into being for the space of a slow heartbeat. Then the thud of running feet, the rising hubbub of many voices.

"Give her air!"

"Keep back. Don't try to move her."

"Somebody call an ambulance."

"Yeah, and somebody call a cop, too."

"I couldn't help it." It was the driver of the ramshackle Chevvie. "She fell off the curb right in front of me. Honest to God, it wasn't my fault."

"Got to report these things right away," said the grey haired man beside him. "No cause to

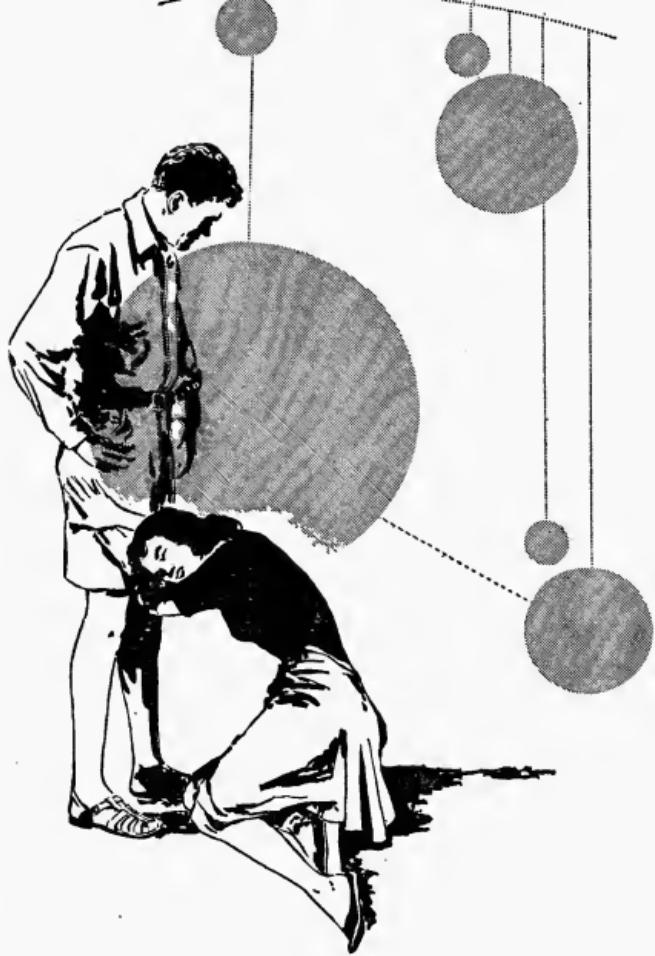
worry if you ain't to blame."

"Probably no brakes," said a heavily accented voice, and another spoke as if on cue, "Probably no insurance, neither."

"Let me through! Oh, please —" The woman's voice was on the edge of hysteria. She came through the crowd like an automaton, not seeing the people she shoved and elbowed aside.

"D.O.A.," said the woman heavily. Her face was no longer twisted with shock, and she was almost pretty again. "D.O.A. Dead on arrival, it means. Oh Jim, I never knew they said that." Suddenly there were tears in her blue eyes. There had been many tears, now.

"Take it easy, Jean honey." Jim Blair hoisted his lank six feet out of the old rocker, and crossed the room, running a nervous hand through his cornshock hair. *She's*



only thirty, he thought, and I'm three years older. That's awfully young to have bred three kids and lost them. He took her in his arms. "I know how tough it is. It's bad enough for me, and probably worse for you. But at least we're sure they'll never be bomb fodder. And we still have Joanna."

She twisted away from him, her voice suddenly bitter. "Don't give me that Pollyanna stuff, Jim. 'Goody, goody, only a broken leg. It might have been your back.' There's no use trying to whitewash it. Our kids, our *own* kids, all gone. Dead." She began to sob. "I wish I were, too."

"Jean, Jean —"

"I don't care. I mean it. Everything bad has happened since Joanna came to live with us."

"Darling, you can't blame the child for a series of accidents."

"I know." She raised her tear-stained face. "But after all — Michael, drowned. Then Steve, falling off the water tower. Now it's Marian." Her fingers gripped his arm tightly. "Jim, each of them was playing alone with Joanna when it happened."

"Accidents, just accidents," he said. It wasn't like Jean, this talk. Almost — His mind shied away from the word, and circled back. Almost paranoid. But Jean was stable, rational, always had been. Still, maybe a little chat with Doctor Holland would be a good

idea. Breakdowns *do* happen."

They both turned at the slamming of the screen door. Then came the patter of childish feet on the kitchen linoleum, and Joanna burst into the room.

"Mommy, I want to play with Marian. Why can't I play with Marian?"

Jean put her arm around the girl's thin shoulder. "Darling, you won't be able to play with Marian for — quite a while. You mustn't worry about it now."

"Mommy, she looked just like she was asleep, then they came and took her away." Her lips trembled. "I'm frightened, Mommy."

Jim looked down at the dark eyes, misted now, the straight brown hair, and the little snub nose with its dusting of freckles. *She's all we have left, poor kid, and not even ours, really. Helen's baby.*

He looked up as the battered cuckoo clock on the mantel clicked warningly. "Time for little girls to be in bed, Joanna. Run along now like a good girl, and get washed." Even as he spoke the miniature doors flew open and the caricature of a bird popped out, shrilly announcing the hour. It cuckooed eight times, then bounced back inside. Joanna watched entranced.

"Bed time, darling," said Jean gently. "School tomorrow, remember? And don't forget to brush your teeth."

"I won't. Goodnight mommy, goodnight daddy." She turned up her face to be kissed, smiled at them, and was gone. They listened to her footsteps on the stairs.

"Jim, I'm sorry about the things I said." Jean's voice was hesitant, a little ashamed. "It is hard, though, you know it is— Jim, aren't you listening? After all, you don't have to watch the clock now." Her smile was as labored as the joke.

He smiled back. "I think I'll take a walk, honey. Some fresh air would do me good."

"Jim, don't go. I'd rather not be alone just now."

"Well." He looked at her, keeping his expression blank. "All right, dear. How about some coffee? I could stand another cup." And he thought: *Tomorrow I'll go. I'll talk to Holland tomorrow.*

"Let me get this straight, Jim." Holland's pudgy face was sober, his eyes serious. "You started out by thinking Jean was showing paranoid tendencies, and offhand I'm inclined to agree with you. Overnight you changed your mind and began thinking that maybe, just maybe, she might be right. Honestly, don't you suspect your own reasons for such a quick switch?"

"Sure I do, Bob," Blair said worriedly. "Do you think I haven't beaten out my brains over it? I know the idea's mon-

strous. But just suppose there *was* a branch of humanity—if you could call it human—living off us unsuspected. A branch that knows how to eliminate—competition—almost by instinct."

"Now hold on a minute, Jim. You've taken Jean's reaction to this last death, plus a random association with a cuckoo clock, and here you are with a perfectly wild hypothesis. You've always been rational and analytical, old man. Surely you can realize that a perfectly normal urge to rationalize Jean's conclusions is making you concur with them against your better judgment."

"Bob—"

"I'm not through, Jim. Just consider how fantastic the whole idea is. Because of a series of accidents you can't accuse a child of planned murder. Nor can you further hypothesize that all orphans are changelings, imbued with an instinct to polish off their foster-siblings."

"Not *all* orphans, Bob. Not planned murder, either. Take it easy. Just some of them. A few of them—different. Growing up. Placing their young with well-to-do families somehow, and then dropping unobtrusively out of the picture. And the young growing up, and always the natural children dying off in one way or another. The changeling inherits, and the process is repeated, step by step. Can you say it's impos-

sible? Do you *know* it's impossible?"

"I wouldn't say impossible, Jim. But I *would* say that your thesis has a remarkably low index of probability. Why don't others suspect, besides you?"

Jim spread his hands hopelessly. "I don't know. Maybe they do. Maybe these creatures—if they do exist—have some means of protection we don't know about."

"You need more than maybes, Jim. What about Joanna Simmons' mother? According to your theories she should have been well off. Was she?"

"No, she wasn't," Jim admitted reluctantly. "She came here and took a job with my outfit. Said she was divorced, and had lived in New York. Then she quit to take a position in California, and we agreed to board Joanna until she got settled. Warrenburg was the town. She was killed there quite horribly, in a terrible auto accident."

"Have you any reason for suspecting skulduggery? Honestly, Jim? Or for labelling her one of your human — er — cuckoos?"

"Only my hunch. We had a newspaper clipping, and a letter from the coroner. We even sent the money for her funeral. But those things could be faked, Bob."

"Give me some evidence that they *were* faked, and I'll be happy to reinspect your views." Holland

levered his avoirdupois out of his chair. "In the meantime, relax. Take a trip if you can. Try not to worry."

Jim grinned humorlessly. "Mustn't let myself get excited, eh? Okay, Bob. But if I get hold of any evidence that I think you might accept, I'll be back. The last laugh and all that. Pending developments you take it easy, too. Don't let yourself get over-worked. Stay out of the sun. So long now."

"So long, Jim."

It was cool in the Warrenburg city hall, though outside the streets were sizzling.

"Sorry, Mr. Blair," said the stout, motherly woman with the horn-rimmed glasses. "We've no record of a Helen Simmons. Nothing whatever." She closed the file with resolute finality.

Jim stared at her. "Are you sure? There must be something. Mightn't there be a special file for accident cases? She was here in Warrenburg. She died here."

The woman thinned her lips, shook her head. "If we had any information, it'd be right where I looked. There isn't a thing. Have you tried her last address? Maybe they could tell you something. We can't."

"I'll try that next. Thanks a lot."

"Sorry we couldn't help you." He went out slowly.

872 Maple was a rambling frame house dozing on a wide flower bordered lot. There was nothing sleepy about the diminutive woman who opened the door to Jim's knock. Snapping black eyes peered at him from a maze of wrinkles. A veined hand moved swiftly to smooth down the white hair that framed her face.

"Looking for someone, young man?"

"Just information, Mrs. —"

"Collins, and it's Miss. Don't give out information about guests. You a bill collector?"

"No, Miss Collins. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to check up on an old friend I lost track of. Helen Simmons. She lived at this address for a while."

"Sure did. Well, come on in.. Mind you, I don't usually do this, Mr. —"

"Blair." Without any fanfare a bill changed hands.

"Mr. Blair. Well, I can't tell you much. Try that green chair for size. What do you want to know?"

Jim studied the toe of his right shoe. His eyes were veiled. "I heard she was hurt, and hard up, and I was worried. My wife and I were friends of hers back east."

"Hurt, hard up? Humph! Not likely, spendin' all her time drivin' that English car around. Takin' trips. I'm not sayin' she didn't mind her manners, though."

"Did she have any close friends?"

"She was chummy with Edith Walton, the girl that works for Doc Mendel. He's county coroner in his spare time. No men. Didn't fool around at all. I'd a known."

Behind Jim's stony eyes the pattern took clearer form, as if a mosaic approached completion. A mosaic of carefully planned events that totalled horror. He shivered as the outlines of his hunch filled in. Helen — what creatures were these? Helen — not dead, not poor, — carefully planting ostensible proof of her death and going on to a new role, a new life, in London or Paris or Rome. A free, untrammelled life. And her child — if child was the word — in his home, repeating the pattern. Eliminating competition as her mother undoubtedly had done. The competition — his and Jean's children! Changeling, changeling — No, not that. Incubus! He shivered again.

"Rabbits on your grave, Mr. Blair?"

He looked up slowly. "Sorry. I was just wondering. Did Miss Simmons have a job while she was here?"

"No, she didn't. One thing she did do was rent a place. Used to be Blands Hardware. Paid a month's rent, too. Said some friends of hers were plannin' to open a mortuary. Seemed like a

funny way for people to do business, but then, no affair of mine."

Funny? No, not funny at all, but icily, eerily logical. There had to be an undertaking parlor where he could send the funeral expenses. He wondered if Helen had laughed when she opened the letter. Everyone his, or her, own undertaker. And the carefully cultivated friend in the coroner's office. For stationery.

He got to his feet. "Thanks a lot, Miss Collins. You've been a great deal of help." He almost smiled as he asked, "I don't suppose she left a forwarding address?"

The old head shook decisively. "Not a thing. Just packed and left, one Monday morning."

All the loose ends tied up tight on a Monday morning. Nothing to cause suspicion. Nothing to worry about. Only a woman's almost paranoid hysteria, — and a glance at a clock. Not very much to unmask — incubus. And what could he do? What *could* he do? Start talking and land in an institution? Well, there was one thing.

"Thanks again, Miss Collins."

He went out.

Swanson didn't look like the general conception of a small town newspaperman. One knew instinctively that his beard wouldn't have been tobacco-stained even if he'd cared to grow one. And he didn't have a bottle of bourbon in

the file marked Miscellaneous, or if he did he didn't bring it out.

"That never came from my paper," he said precisely. He handed the clipping back to Jim. "We don't use that type, for one thing. For another, Miss Simmons, so far as I know, wasn't killed here or anywhere else."

"You knew her?"

"I knew of her. I never met her."

"What about this report of her death?"

Swanson shrugged; tented manicured fingers. "It's a hoax. Any job printing shop with a linotype could do it. In all likelihood it was some place in San Francisco. That's closest. It would be very difficult to check." His curiosity was showing.

"I see. Well, thanks for your time and trouble, Mr. Swanson."

"Not at all. Sorry I couldn't be of more help."

One thing to do. One thing that must be done.

Motors over the mountains. And riding with them, the numb resolve. Motors over the salt pans, the wheat lands, the corn belt.

The stewardess stops again. "Coffee, sir? A sandwich, perhaps?"

"I beg your — Oh no. No thanks."

She watches him covertly, uneasily, longing for the end of the run.

Motors in the night.

And the dull determination growing, strengthening.

The airport, baggage, the ancient taxi with the piston slap, and at last the dark, familiar street.

"Jim, you're back! Oh Jim, darling. Next time they send you west I'm going too. I am!"

"Okay Jean, sure. Why not?"

"What's the matter, dear? Oh, you're tired, of course. I should have known. Sit down, Jim. Let me get you a drink."

"In a minute, Jean." Do it now now NOW! "Where's Joanna?"

"She's in bed. Hours ago. Jim, has something —?"

"Nothing, dear. I just want to look in on her. And freshen up a bit, of course."

"Jim —"

He smoothed away the worried frown with his forefinger.

"In a minute, dear."

She smiled uncertainly. "Hurry back, Jim."

The stairs unwind irrevocably, slow motion in a nightmare. The bedroom door opens, the hall light dim on the bed and the child's face. Incubus in the half dark.

For a moment Jim remembered wondering somewhere, sometime, what strange powers of protection might be implicit in such a creature. As the thought came into his mind, Joanna stirred. She opened her eyes and looked at him.

He took one step toward the bed.

The little girl eyes over their dusting of freckles slit. Then they opened wide, became two glowing golden lakes that grew, and grew —

There was the feeling of a great soundless explosion in his mind. Waves of cool burning in his brain, churning and bubbling in every unknown corner, every cranny. Here and there a cell, or a group of cells, blanked out, the complex molecules reverting, becoming new again. Ready for fresh punch marks. Synapses shorted with soundless cold fire, and waited in timeless stasis for re-channelling. The waves frothed, became ripples, were gone. He stood unmoving.

What was it he was supposed to do? Let's see — Tuck Joanna's blanket around her. But she was covered up snugly. Sleeping soundly, too, and for a few seconds he'd thought she was awake. And Jean was waiting downstairs, Jean and a cool drink.

Oh yes, stop in the bathroom.

The stairs wind up again. It is good to be with one's family, relaxed in the well known chair. Not a worry in the world.

He sat there, his mind at ease, not caring much about anything. He didn't even look up when the clock on the mantel whirred, and the ridiculous bird popped out of its nest to herald a new day.



APPOINTMENT AT NOON

BY ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

He had no calling card, no references, nor any apparent reason for coming. But he would not be put off.

HENRY CURRAN was big, busy and impatient of triflers. He had the build of a wrestler, the soul of a tiger, and his time was worth a thousand bucks and hour. He knew of nobody who rated more.

And crime did not pay? Bah!

Jungle tactics paid off. The entire opposition had been conditioned out of men by what is called civilisation.

Entering his spacious office with the swift, heavy tread of a large man in fighting trim, Henry slung his hat onto a hook, glanced at the wall-clock, noted that it registered ten minutes to twelve.

Planting himself in the seat behind his desk, he kept his expectant gaze upon the door through which he had entered. His wait lasted about ten seconds. Scowling at the thought of it, Curran reached over and thumbed

a red stud on his big desk.

"What's wrong with you?" he snapped when Miss Reed came in. "You get worse every day. Old age creeping over you or something?"

She posed, tall, neat and precise, facing him cross the desk, her eyes wearing a touch of humility born of fear. Curran employed only those about whom he knew too much.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Curran, I was—"

"Never mind the alibi. Be faster—or else! Speed's what I like. *Speed—see?*"

"Yes, Mr. Curran."

"Has Lolloredo phoned in yet?"

"No, Mr. Curran."

"He should be through by now if everything went all right." He viewed the clock again, tapped irritably on his desk. "If he's made a mess of it and the mouth-

piece comes on, tell him to let Lolordo stew. He's in no position to talk, anyway. A spell in jail will teach him not to be stupid."

"Yes, Mr. Curran. There's an old —"

"Shut up till I've finished. If Michaelson calls up and says the *Firefly* got through, ring Voss and tell him without delay. And I mean without delay! That's important!" He mused a moment, finished, "There's that meeting downtown at twelve-twenty. God knows how long it will go on but if they want trouble they can have it aplenty. If anyone asks, you don't know where I am and you don't expect me back before four."

"But, Mr. Curran —"

"You heard what I said. Nobody sees me before four."

"There's a man already here," she got out with a sort of apologetic breathlessness. "He said you have an appointment with him at two minutes to twelve."

"And you fell for a gag like that?" He studied her with open contempt.

"I can only repeat what he said. He seemed quite sincere."

"That's a change," scoffed Curran. "Sincerity in the outer office. He's got the wrong address. Go tell him to spread himself across the tracks."

"I said you were out and didn't know when you would return. He took a seat and said he'd

wait because you would be back at ten to twelve."

Involuntarily, both stared at the clock. Curran bent an arm, eyed his wristwatch by way of checking the accuracy of the instrument on the wall.

"That's what the scientific bigbrains would call precognition. I call it a lucky guess. One minute either way would have made him wrong. He ought to back horses." He made a gesture of dismissal. "Push him out — or do I have to get the boys to do it for you?"

"That wouldn't be necessary. He is old and blind."

"I don't give a damn if he's armless and legless — that's *his* tough luck. Give him the rush."

Obediently she left. A few moments later she was back with the martyred air of one compelled to face his wrath.

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Curran, but he insists that he has a date with you for two minutes to twelve. He is to see you about a personal matter of major importance."

Curran scowled at the wall. The clock said four minutes to twelve. He spoke with sardonic emphasis.

"I know no blind man and I don't forget appointments. Throw him down the stairs."

She hesitated, standing there wide-eyed. "I'm wondering whether —"

"Out with it!"

"Whether he's been sent to you by someone who'd rather he couldn't identify you by sight."

He thought it over, said "Could be. You use your brains once in a while. What's his name?"

"He won't say."

"Nor state his business?"

"No."

"H'm! I'll give him two minutes. If he's panhandling for some charity he'll go out through the window. Tell him time is precious and show him in."

She went away, brought back the visitor, gave him a chair. The door closed quietly behind her. The clock said three minutes before the hour.

Curran lounged back and surveyed his caller, finding him tall, gaunt and white-haired. The olderster's clothes were uniformly black, a deep, somber, solemn black that accentuated the brilliance of the blue, unseeing eyes staring from his colorless face.

Those strange eyes were the other's most noteworthy feature. They held a most curious quality of blank penetration as if somehow they could look *into* the things they could not look *at*. And they were sorry — sorry for what they saw.

For the first time in his life feeling a faint note of alarm,

Curran said, "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," responded the other. "Nothing at all."

His low, organlike voice was pitched at no more than a whisper and with its sounding a queer coldness came over the room. He sat there unmoving and staring at whatever a blind man can see. The coldness increased, became bitter. Curran shivered despite himself. He scowled and got a hold on himself.

"Don't take up my time," advised Curran. "State your business or get to hell out."

"People don't take up time. Time takes up people."

"What the blazes do you mean? Who are you?"

"You know who I am. Every man is a shining sun unto himself until dimmed by his dark companion."

"You're not funny," said Curran, freezing.

"I am never funny."

The tiger light blazed in Curran's eyes as he stood up, placed a thick, firm finger near his desk-stud.

"Enough of this tomfoolery! What d'you want?"

Suddenly extending a lengthless, dimensionless arm, Death whispered sadly, "You!"

And took him.

At exactly two minutes to twelve.

KEEP OUT

(Continued from page 81)

"In another ten years, at maturity, you will be completely acclimated to Mars. Its air will be your air; its food plants your food. Its extremes of temperature will be easy for you to endure and its median temperatures pleasant to you. Already, because of the five years we spent in space under gradually decreased gravitational pull, the gravity of Mars seems normal to you.

"It will be your planet, to live on and to populate. You are the children of Earth but you are the first Martians."

Of course we had known a lot of those things already.

The last year was the best. By then the air inside the dome — except for the pressurized parts where our teachers and attendants live — was almost like that outside, and we were allowed out for increasingly long periods. It is good to be in the open.

The last few months they relaxed segregation of the sexes so we could begin choosing mates, although they told us there is to be no marriage until after the final day, after our full clearance. Choosing was not difficult in my case. I had made my choice long since and I'd felt sure that she felt the same way; I was right.

Tomorrow is the day of our

freedom. Tomorrow we will be Martians, *the Martians*. Tomorrow we shall take over the planet.

Some among us are impatient, have been impatient for weeks now, but wiser counsel prevailed and we are waiting. We have waited twenty years and we can wait until the final day.

And tomorrow is the final day.

Tomorrow, at a signal, we will kill the teachers and the other Earthmen among us before we go forth. They do not suspect, so it will be easy.

We have dissimilated for years now, and they do not know how we hate them. They do not know how disgusting and hideous we find them, with their ugly misshapen bodies, so narrow sholdered and tiny chested, their weak sibilant voices that need amplification to carry in our Martian air, and above all their white pasty hairless skins.

We shall kill them and then we shall go and smash the other dome so all the Earthmen there will die too.

If more Earthmen ever come to punish us, we can live and hide in the hills where they'll never find us. And if they try to build more domes here we'll smash them. We want no more to do with Earth.

This is our planet and we want no aliens. Keep off!

Death of a Spaceman

(Continued from page 21)

she came back and poured him an insignificant drink.

"Well?"

"I don't know," she said. "I saw Father Paul on the terrace, talking to somebody."

"Is it time?"

She glanced at the clock, looked at him doubtfully, and nodded. "Nearly time."

The orchestra finished a number, but the babble of laughing voices continued. Old Donegal sagged. "They won't do it. They're the Keiths, Martha. Why should I ruin their party?"

She turned to stare at him, slowly shook her head. He heard someone shouting, but then a trumpet started softly, introducing a new number. Martha sucked in a hurt breath, pressed her hands together, and hurried from the room.

"It's too late," he said after her.

Her footsteps stopped on the stairs. The trumpet was alone. Donegal listened; and there was no babble of voices, and the rest of the orchestra was silent. Only the trumpet sang — and it puzzled him, hearing the same slow bugle-notes of the call played at the lowering of the colors.

The trumpet stopped suddenly. Then he knew it had been for him.

A brief hush — then thunder came from the blast-station two

miles to the west. First the low reverberation, rattling the windows, then the rising growl as the sleek beast knifed skyward on a column of bluewhite hell. It grew and grew until it drowned the distant traffic sounds and dominated the silence outside.

Quit crying, you old fool, you maudlin ass . . .

"My boots," he whispered, "my boots . . . please . . ."

"You've got them on, Donny."

He sank quietly then. He closed his eyes and let his heart go up with the beast, and he sank into the gravity padding of the blastroom, and Caid was with him, and Oley. And when Ronald Keith, III, instructed the orchestra to play Blastroom Man, after the beast's rumble had waned, Old Donegal was on his last moon-run, and he was grinning. He'd had a good day.

Martha went to the window to stare out at the thin black trail that curled starward above the blast station through the twilight sky. Guests on the terrace were watching it too.

The doorbell rang. That would be Ken, too late. She closed the window against the chill breeze, and went back to the bed. The boots, the heavy, clumsy boots — they clung to the bedframe, with his feet half out of them. She took them off gently and set them out of company's sight. Then she went to answer the door.

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